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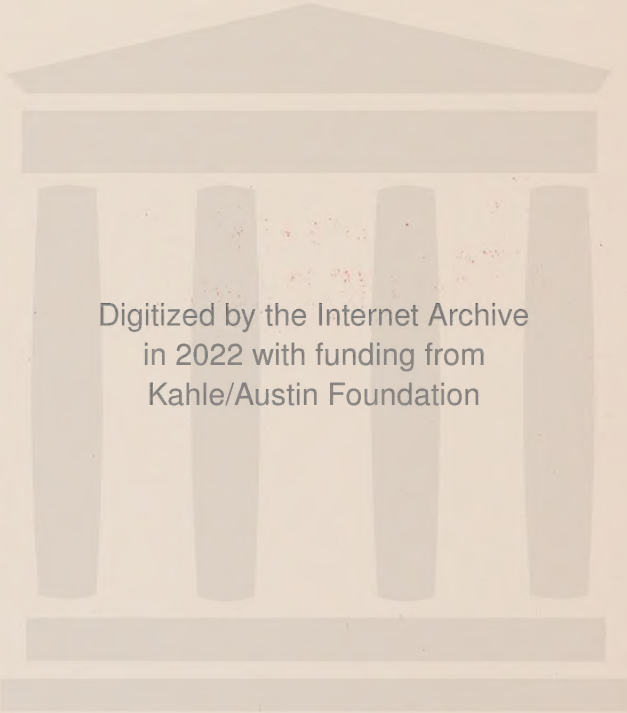


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# HOW TO GET THE BEST OUT OF BOOKS



RICHARD  
LEGALLIENNE



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HOW TO GET THE BEST  
OUT OF BOOKS









RICHARD Le GALLIENNE



# How to get the Best Out of Books

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By  
Richard Le Gallienne

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*To* TEMPLE SCOTT

*A peppercorn acknowledgment of an old and  
true friendship.*

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Liverpool, 1887—New York, 1904.

*Of the following papers "What we Look for Nowadays in Books" has not been printed before. The others have all appeared in SUCCESS, to the editor of which magazine, Dr. O. S. Marden, I am indebted for his kind permission to reprint; and I desire especially to express my indebtedness to my friend Mr. Robert Mackay, the associate editor, for the suggestions out of which all the papers sprang.*

**R. Le G.**

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HOW TO GET THE BEST  
OUT OF BOOKS

*What is a great love of books ?*

*It is something like a personal introduction to the great and good of all times.*

—JOHN BRIGHAM.

*When all that is worldly turns to dross around us, books only retain their steady value.*

—WASHINGTON IRVING.

## *Introduction*

THESE papers were written with an intention, and from a point of view, which will, I fear, seem humble enough to professed literary persons; and by such will need to be approached, if approached at all, with a certain condescension — that condescension which, to academic ways of thinking, is the beginning of criticism.

All arts and even sciences are in a measure aristocracies, but they are aristocracies of nature — they are not castes, which are merely aristocracies of convention with a thin thread of natural ancestry; and, alas! they seldom pass from father to son. It is, however, the natural aim — human nature being naturally financial — of those professional and academic bodies and persons who deal with the non-hereditary arts and sciences to persuade the superstitious

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natural man that they alone are the depositaries of the gifts of remote great-great-cousins of genius, or the closely-cupboarded lore of family ties; that in fact the arts and sciences *are* castes as well.

And the natural man believes them on his knees! For practical purposes of definition nowadays, the natural man may be defined as the business man. Either the business man superstitiously accepts the authority, on literary matters, of the bloodless professor, or with ignorant contempt denies the importance of literature altogether.

The aim of these simple pages has been to convince him that literature is a living thing, and that the relation of books to life is close and vital—and by no means merely ornamental. Owing to the proprietorial manner of the academies, he has come to look upon books—and incidentally upon the writers of them—as so much fancy-work, and, dare I say, so many curates!—either as such, or as Sinaitic presences, and hierophants, of mysterious and unpractical knowledge. It is only

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now and again, aroused by some voice of piercing reality, of primeval freshness, some voice irresistibly calling from the heart, or with vivid simplicity lighting up some daily duty or some hidden human dream, that he realizes that books too are realities and that the writers of books also are helping to build the world.







HOW TO GET THE BEST  
OUT OF BOOKS



## I

ONE is sometimes asked by young people panting after the water-brooks of knowledge: "How shall I get the best out of books?" Here, indeed, is one of those questions which can only be answered in general terms, with possible illustrations from one's own personal experience. Misgivings, too, as to one's fitness to answer it may well arise, as wistfully looking round one's own bookshelves, one asks oneself: "Have I myself got the best out of this wonderful world of books?" It is almost like asking oneself: "Have I got the best out of life?"

As we make the survey, it will surely happen that our eyes fall on many writers whom the

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stress of life, or spiritual indolence, has prevented us from using as all the while they have been eager to be used; friends we might have made yet have never made, neglected counsellors we would so often have done well to consult, guides that could have saved us many a wrong turning in the difficult way. There, in unvisited corners of our shelves, what neglected fountains of refreshment, gardens in which we have never walked, hills we have never climbed!

“Well,” we say with a sigh, “a man cannot read everything; it is life that has interrupted our studies, and probably the fact is that we have accumulated more books than we really need.” The young reader’s appetite is largely in his eyes, and it is very natural for one who is born with a taste for books to gather them about him at first indiscriminately, on the

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hearsay recommendation of fame, before he really knows what his own individual tastes are, or are going to be, and, in that wistful survey I have imagined, our eyes will fall, too, with some amusement, on not a few volumes to which we never have had any really personal relation, and which, whatever their distinction or their value for others, were never meant for us. The way to do with such books is to hand them over to some one who has a use for them. On our shelves they are like so much good thrown away, invitations to entertainments for which we have no taste. In all vital libraries, such a process of progressive refection is continually going on, and to realize what we do not want in books, or cannot use, must, obviously, be a first principle in our getting the best out of them.

Yes, we read too many books, and too many

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that, as they do not really interest us, bring us neither benefit nor diversion. Even from the point of view of reading for pleasure, we manage our reading badly. We listlessly allow ourselves to be bullied by publishers' advertisements into reading the latest fatuity in fiction, without, in one case out of twenty, finding any of that pleasure we are ostensibly seeking. Instead, indeed, we are bored and enervated, where we might have been refreshed, either by romance or laughter. Such reading resembles the idle absorption of innocuous but uninteresting beverages, which cheer as little as they inebriate, and yet at the same time make frivolous demands on the digestive functions. No one but a publisher could call such reading "light." Actually it is weariness of the flesh and heaviness of the spirit.

If, therefore, our idea of the best in books is



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the recreation they can so well bring, if we go to books as to a playground to forget our cares, and to blow off the cobwebs of business, let us make sure that we find what we seek. It is there sure enough. The playgrounds of literature are indeed wide, and alive with bracing excitement, nor is there any limit to the variety of the games. But let us be sure, when we set out to be amused, that we are really amused, that our humourists do really make us laugh, and that our story-tellers have stories to tell and know how to tell them. Beware of imitations, and, when in doubt, try Shakespeare, and Dumas, — even Ouida. As a rule, avoid the “spring lists,” or “summer reading.” “Summer reading” is usually very hot work.

Hackneyed as it is, there is no better general advice on reading than Shakespeare’s —

No profit is where is no pleasure taken,

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In brief, sir, study what you most affect.

Not only in regard to books whose purpose, frankly, is recreation, but also in regard to the graver uses of books, this counsel no less holds. No reading does us any good that is not a pleasure to us. Her paths are paths of pleasantness. Yet, of course, this does not mean that all profitable reading is easy reading. Some of the books that give us the finest pleasure need the closest application for their enjoyment. There is always a certain spiritual and mental effort necessary to be made before we tackle the great books. One might compare it to the effort of getting up to see the sun rise. It is no little of a tug to leave one's warm bed, — but once we are out in the crystalline morning air, wasn't it worth it? Perhaps our finest pleasure always demand some such austerity of preparation. That is the secret of the truest epicu-

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reanism. Books like Dante's "Divine Comedy," or Plato's dialogues, will not give themselves to a lounging reader. They demand a braced, attentive spirit. But when the first effort has been made, how exhilarating are the altitudes in which we find ourselves, what a glow of pure joy is the reward which we are almost sure to win by our mental mountaineering.

But such books are not for moments when we are unwilling or unable to make that necessary effort. We cannot always be in the mood for the great books, and often we are too tired physically, or too low down on the depressed levels of daily life, even to lift our eyes toward the hills. To attempt the great books, — or any books at all, — in such moods and moments, is a mistake. We may thus contract a prejudice against some writer who, ap-

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proached in more fortunate moments, would prove the very man we were looking for.

To know when to read is hardly less important than to know what to read. Of course, every one must decide the matter for himself; but one general counsel may be ventured: Read only what you want to read, and only when you want to read it.

Some readers find the early morning, when they have all the world to themselves, their best time for reading, and, if you are a good sleeper, and do not find early rising more wearying than refreshing, there is certainly no other time of the day when the mind is so eagerly receptive, has so keen an edge of appetite, and absorbs a book in so fine an intoxication. For your true book-lover there is no other exhilaration so exquisite as that with which one reads an inspiring book in the solemn

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freshness of early morning. One's nerves seem peculiarly strung for exquisite impressions in the first dewy hours of the day, there is a virginal sensitiveness and purity about all our senses, and the mere delight of the eye in the printed page is keener than at any other time. "The Muses love the morning, and that is a fit time for study," said Erasmus to his friend Christianus of Lubeck; and, certainly, if early rising agrees with one, there is no better time for getting the very best out of a book. Moreover, morning reading has a way of casting a spell of peace over the whole day. It has a sweet, solemnizing effect on our thoughts, — a sort of mental matins, — and through the day's business it accompanies us as with hidden music.

There are other readers who prefer to do their reading at night, and I presume that

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most readers of this paper are so circumstanced as to have no time to spare for reading during the day. Personally, I think that one of the best places to read is in bed. Paradoxical as it may sound, one is not so apt to fall asleep over his book in bed as in the postprandial armchair. While one's body rests itself, one's mind remains alert, and, when the time for sleep comes at last, it passes into unconsciousness, tranquilized and sweetened with thought and pleasantly weary with healthy exercise. One awakens, too, next morning, with, so to say, a very pleasant taste of meditation in the mouth. Erasmus, again, has a counsel for the bedtime reader, expressed with much felicity. "A little before you sleep," he says, "read something that is exquisite, and worth remembering; and contemplate upon it till you fall asleep; and, when you awake in the



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morning, call yourself to an account for it."

In an old *Atlantic Monthly*, from which, if I remember aright, he never rescued it, Oliver Wendell Holmes has a delightful paper on the delights of reading in bed, entitled "Pillow-Smoothing Authors."

Then, though I suppose we shall have the oculists against us, the cars are good places to read in, — if you have the power of detachment, and are able to switch off your ears from other people's conversation. It is a good plan to have a book with you in all places and at all times. Most likely you will carry it many a day and never give it a single look, but, even so, a book in the hand is always a companionable reminder of that happier world of fancy, which, alas! most of us can only visit by playing truant from the real world. As some men wear *bouttonnières*, so a reader carries a book,

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and sometimes, when he is feeling the need of beauty, or the solace of a friend, he opens it, and finds both. Probably he will count among the most fruitful moments of his reading the snatched glimpses of beauty and wisdom he has caught in the morning car. The covers of his book have often proved like some secret door, through which, surreptitiously opened, he has looked for a moment into his own particular fairy land. Never mind the oculist, therefore, but, whenever you feel like it, read in the car.

One or two technical considerations may be dealt with in this place. How to remember what one reads is one of them. Some people are blest with such good memories that they never forget anything that they have once read. Literary history has recorded many miraculous memories. Still, it is quite possible to remem-

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ber too much, and thus turn one's mind into a lumber-room of useless information. A good reader forgets even more than he remembers. Probably we remember all that is really necessary for us, and, except in so far as our reading is technical and directed toward some exact science or profession, accuracy of memory is not important. As the Sabbath was made for man, so books were made for the reader, and, when a reader has assimilated from any given book his own proper nourishment and pleasure, the rest of the book is so much oyster shell. The end of true reading is the development of individuality. Like a certain water insect, the reader instinctively selects from the outspread world of books the building materials for the house of his soul. He chooses here and rejects there, and remembers or forgets according to the formative desire of his nature. Yet it

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often happens that he forgets much that he needs to remember, and thus the question of methodical aids to memory arises.

One's first thought, of course, is of the commonplace book. Well, have you ever kept one, or, to be more accurate, tried to keep one? Personally, I believe in the commonplace book so long as we don't expect too much from it. Its two dangers are (1) that one is apt to make far too many and too minute entries, and (2) that one is apt to leave all the remembering to the commonplace book, with a consequent relaxation of one's own attention. On the other hand, the mere discipline of a commonplace book is a good thing, and if — as I think is the best way — we copy out the passages at full length, they are thus the more securely fixed in the memory. A commonplace book kept with moderation is really useful, and may be

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delightful. But the entries should be made at full length. Otherwise, the thing becomes a mere index, an index which encourages us to forget.

Another familiar way of assisting one's memory in reading is to mark one's own striking passages. This method is chiefly worth while for the sake of one's second and subsequent readings; though it all depends when one makes the markings, — at what time of his life, I mean. Markings made at the age of twenty years are of little use at thirty, — except negatively. In fact, I have usually found that all I care to read again of a book read at twenty is just the passages I did not mark. This consideration, however, does not depreciate the value of one's comparatively contemporary markings. At the same time, marking, like indexing, is apt, unless guarded against,

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to relax the memory. One is apt to mark a passage in lieu of remembering it. Still, for a second reading, as I say, — a second reading not too long after the first, — marking is a useful method, particularly if one regards his first reading of a book as a prospecting of the ground rather than a taking possession. One's first reading is a sort of flying visit, during which he notes the places he would like to visit again and really come to know. A brief index of one's markings at the end of a volume is a method of memory that commended itself to the booklovers of former days, — to Leigh Hunt, for instance.

Yet none of these external methods, useful as they may prove, can compare with a habit of thorough attention. We read far too hurriedly, too much in the spirit of the "quick lunch." No doubt we do so a great deal from

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the misleading idea that there is so very much to read. Actually, there is very little to read, —if we wish for real reading, — and there is time to read it all twice over. We — Americans — bolt our books as we do our food, and so get far too little good out of them. We treat our mental digestions as brutally as we treat our stomachs. Meditation is the digestion of the mind, but we allow ourselves no time for meditation. We gorge our eyes with the printed page, but all too little of what we take in with our eyes ever reaches our minds or our spirits. We assimilate what we can from all this hurry of superfluous food, and the rest goes to waste, and, as a natural consequence, contributes only to the wear and tear of our mental organism.

Books should be real things. They were so once, when a man would give a fat field in ex-

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change for a small manuscript; and they are no less real to-day, — some of them. Each age contributes one or two real books to the eternal library, — and always the old books remain, magic springs of healing and refreshment. If no one should write a book for a thousand years, there are quite enough books to keep us going. Real books there are in plenty. Perhaps there are more real books than there are real readers. Books are the strong tincture of experience. They are to be taken carefully, drop by drop, not carelessly gulped down by the bottle. Therefore, if you would get the best out of books, spend a quarter of an hour in reading, and three-quarters of an hour in thinking over what you have read.



WHAT WE LOOK FOR NOWADAYS  
IN BOOKS

*“The soul,*

*Forever and forever—longer than soil is  
brown and solid—longer than water ebbs  
and flows.”*

WALT WHITMAN.

## II

**O**F course, in a sense, we are all looking for something different—for the simple reason that we are looking for ourselves, yet, far more than they have any idea of, in spite of personal deflections of taste, readers of the same period, broadly speaking, are usually looking for the same thing.

When I say readers, I mean readers. I do not mean the listless multitude that reads the novel of the season it knows not why, nor do I mean the little dancing-masters of letters. I mean people to whom, so to say, reading is a vital function; with whom breathing and reading go together; those for whom reading is the main avenue of their spiritual and intellectual

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lives, and the books they read a large part of their personal experience.

Such readers in any given time are usually, in spite of surface differences of taste, looking for certain qualities, which, as we say, are mysteriously in the air at the moment; and it is a strange thing how those qualities manifest themselves in different countries at the same periods, in apparently independent manifestations. Just as the brain of the world would seem to quicken into new inventions or intellectual hypotheses at the same moment, as though in obedience to some universal impulse of advance, so the soul would seem to flower in different parts of the world at the same moment.

When a new thought has occurred to some lonely philosopher in one part of the world, it will almost surely have occurred to some

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other lonely philosopher in another part; and whenever young people in one country are awakening to some new mood of feeling, some attitude towards life that seems to restore to it a lost freshness and sincerity, they have, though all unaware of it, groups of young friends all over the world, equally enthusiastic, and, as it seems to them, equally adventurous and unfriended. Nature is one with the young, and "the wide world dreaming of things to come" naturally whispers its dreams into the ears of youth — youth sensitive, passionate, pure, and so seriously bent on the making of a better world.

Books like, say, Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads," or Goethe's "Werther," are but the sudden blossoming of a world-wide spring long preparing underground, and we, with the whole expressive literature of the nineteenth

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century for our inheritance, can hardly understand what a thrill of freshness, what an unspeakable boon of sympathy, there must have been for the heart and the mind in such harbingers of so new and natural a style of writing, after a century so mundane, so urban, as the eighteenth. O! what a blessed sense of reality, what a human touch, what a natural voice, after so many years of hollow elegance and heartless brilliancy. So long had the heart been asking for bread, and been given a polished stone. But here was Blake, with his vision of a world of the spirit which men seemed to have forgotten for a hundred years; and here was Burns singing of human love with the pang and pathos of love as men really felt it—not mincing about it in couplets; and here was Wordsworth with the first real daisies since Shakespeare, and his glad tidings of the Great Mother.

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The reaction against the eighteenth century was the most representative example of a reaction that is perennial in the history of literature; for the eighteenth century itself was not merely a passing phase of humanity: it classically fixed a type of living common to all ages, a certain materialistic middle-age attitude towards life, to which in every century certain temperaments naturally conform, and to which men of certain ages are too apt to settle down. All other centuries except the eighteenth seem to have been young once. The eighteenth century came into the world with all the kindly disillusionment, the modulated manners, the gracious comprehension, the inhuman humanity, of a man of the world; and its literature, with all its brilliant qualities, is correspondingly mundane and middle-aged. It treats of life in so urban a fashion, and in vain we seek

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amid all its complacent perfection for that sense of the immortal something in mortal affairs, the realization or non-realization of which is the most important of all the dividing lines of human character, as it is the touchstone which we grow more and more to apply to literature and to all our art.

When youth cries out that Pope is no poet, and turns to its Shelley and its Keats, it is this quality it misses — the thrill of a divine significance in human experience to which youth is so blessedly alive. What is mere verbal dexterity against this essential failure, this temperamental omission in the poet's nature? Merely to be able so skilfully to use such an instrument as the couplet, an instrument so incapable of those vibrations which are the very soul and mystery of music, argues at once a spiritual limitation in the performer, is in itself a suffi-



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cient sign that the poet is a stranger to those mystic intimations of immortality, sensitiveness to which is what we mean by the poet's nature.

And as with Pope, so with Gibbon, so with all the eighteenth century — so even with Dr. Johnson. Even in their loftiest moments, there is an urban accent about their speech which robs it of sympathetic appeal, and, so to say, townifies the most elemental themes and natural emotions. Their attitude to the heights and depths of human existence is much the same as their attitude to the sublime and wilder aspects of nature. The great mysteries and passions of the soul they regard as amazing and picturesque phenomena quite external to themselves — as tourists drive out to see a volcano, or visitors to an observatory gaze placidly through the big telescope at the terrible stars, and then go home contentedly

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to supper. That they have any part in these savage forces, and impressive mysteries, except as observers, never seems to occur to them. The universe has culminated in the coffee-house. That they themselves are even more mysterious than the stars, and that there is something in the soul of man piteously infinite, and in his lot a spiritual agony of ascension tragically divine, are matters that seem entirely undreamed of by these masters of well groomed prose and smartly tailored verse.

It is for this reason that youth and the eighteenth century are born enemies, and when I say youth I mean that sensitive receptive youth of the spirit ever eager for the vital touch, the expressive word, in books, which is a matter of temperament rather than years; and when I say eighteenth century, I mean that attitude and accent in books which is

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merely of this world, materialistic, middle-aged, every-day, settled-down — all that merely concrete, opaque writing, unlit by any inner dream, or untouched by any supernatural radiance, unvisited by “whispers and hints of the infinite sea.” Yes! the books of this world.

No history repeats itself so surely as the history of literature, and we at the beginning of the twentieth century are once more in the midst of a similar reaction to that against the eighteenth century of which I have been writing. Once more we have been passing through a period, though a comparatively brief one, of spiritual eclipse and intellectual materialism; and once more, passing out of it, we “again behold the stars.” Materialism in eighteenth century literature took the form of what we might call Urbanism. In the nineteenth cen-

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ture it has taken the form of Realism. In one case the eclipse might be said to have come through spiritual indifference, in the other through spiritual despair. With all the splendid literature of awakening which had been born of its revolt against the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century could not fall back into any such placid torpor as that from which it had so mightily aroused itself. Its materialism was of different origin, and came rather from the bad waking dreams of its too eager watchfulness, came, in fact, of those nightmares of science before which for a while the soul of man has fled shrieking, letting fall, as it seemed, all the spiritual gains of the centuries, and all the natural dreams of the heart. Those "terrible muses," astronomy, geology, and especially biology, had come with so much grim science, and had applied it so confidently

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to the human mystery, and, with such apparent finality, so clearly demonstrated not merely man's insignificance, but his utter earthiness and kinship to "the beasts that perish," that his old dreams of himself, his noble spiritual warfare, his transfiguring idealisms, seemed lost to him forever, the toys of his fanciful childhood. If, in the materialism of the eighteenth century, man had foregone so much of his birthright as to have shrunk into the fine gentleman, he still remained superficially human; but the materialism of the nineteenth century stripped him even of his humanity, and in the literature of so-called realism presented him as *la bête humaine*. Man a spirit! Man is not even a man! Man is just this beast we show you. This is what he calls his love! This foul corpse is all that comes of all his dreams!

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The men who wrote so believed in what they wrote, wrote often what they deemed the truth about life in prophetic agony of soul, if sometimes with the impious cynicism of a bitter disillusion, to which the pieties of the heart no less than those of the churches had become so many empty words. It was from the hurried deductions of an immature science that pessimism, realism, and the varied cynicism and materialism of the past thirty or forty years have sprung. Over hastily, some of us may think, man had allowed science to rob him not only of God but of his own soul, and with the loss of them necessarily went for a while many an ennobling faith and ideal, by which he had been wont to guide his steps in a difficult world. Even mere humanity itself, as it used to be called, seems to have been cast overboard as useless from a ship that has no captain and

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no destination, and no motives to restrain the pirate instincts of the crew. Thus we have seen once more the deification of brute force, the cynical suppression of weak nations by the strong, the impudent mockery of moral ideas both in public and private life, the glorification of material luxury, which necessarily follow when mankind for a time has ceased to "think nobly of the soul." All the old brutal lies about life have flourished once more like green bay-trees; and, after all the travail of the nineteenth century, we are rewarded with Mr. Chamberlain, the German Emperor, Mr. Kipling and—Kischenev.

However, this nineteenth century materialism is about to pass away, as the eighteenth century materialism passed; and with it its literature of realism and brutality is passing, too.

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Return, Alphæus, the dread voice is past  
That shrunk thy streams! Return, Sicilian  
muse!

Tennyson's "terrible muses" have not, after all, displaced the immortal nine from the sacred hill, but only given, maybe, a still more solemn note to their song, taught them a deeper, more cosmic, strain. Science has proved no match for religion, after all, and whereas a short time ago she seemed so cruel an enemy of his soul, who knows but that it shall be she who some day shall prove that man is indeed a spirit; for more and more the new laws of science are confirming the old laws of the soul. Mortal or immortal, man feels once more that, be his life for a day or for an eternity, it is in some way or other of a divine importance how he lives it. Immortal he may not be, but beast he is not, nor shall his life deny his mysterious in-



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instincts of spiritual growth at the bidding of any biologist. For short time or long, it is good to be pure and strong and gentle, good to have loved nobly and worked worthily, good to have hated evil and cruelty, to have protected the weak and fed the hungry — whatever the philosophers may say; and the books that deny or fail to take account of this indestructible, if irrational, conscience in humanity will in the future be more and more written in vain.

To glance a while at literature in the immediate present — it seems just now to be, so to say, at slack water. There are few, if any, quite new writers of importance, but there are a few young writers already emerged into fame, who may reasonably be expected to have their greatest work before them, and who are certainly of sufficient note to show in what direction the tide is about to run. Such writers are

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Mæterlinck, D'Annunzio, Stephen Phillips, W. B. Yeats, Joseph Conrad and Maurice Hewlett. These, obviously, are very different writers, but they have one unmistakable quality in common, a certain spiritual romanticism of attitude, and a certain thrilling reality of style, which again, for want of a better word, I must call spiritual; an expressiveness in which the sensuous beauty, often great, seems to count for less than the accent of spiritual pathos in mortal things, which, perhaps, who knows, is the meaning of beauty.

But the chief significance of these writers to our present consideration is that they are popular. They are no mere coterie authors. They sell. Yet up till quite lately nothing could have seemed stranger, or more unlikely than their success. If ever dream-pedlars came to market, it is these six writers. But a

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very short time ago there was not one of them who might not have taken Beddoes' old snatch to himself:

If there were dreams to sell,  
Merry or sad to tell,  
And the crier rang the bell,  
Who then would buy!

Who indeed? The mockery that first greeted Mæterlinck is hardly yet a matter of yesterday. Was there ten years ago a forlorn figure in literature than W. B. Yeats, with his Irish fairies and his haunted little star-lit songs? and who indeed could have foretold the present close association between Stephen Phillips and — Charles Frohman. And think of this, too! It is Mr. Charles Frohman who “presents” — *Everyman*. D’Annunzio is indeed tarred with the brush of realism, but his occasional grossness and perverseness are superficial. The

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breath of life in his work is its poetic passion, its imaginative vision, and such is of the spirit. Mr. Conrad and Mr. Hewlett again, writers indeed different, though prose writers, are essentially poets, and the significance of their work, over and above its literary qualities, is again that same atmosphere of spiritual romance, that note of the wonder of the world, which we had loved long since and lost awhile.

Stevenson once wrote, and at the moment he was a voice crying in the wilderness, that "the true realism is that of the poets," and it is just that realism of the poets to which we are returning. It is not those who dig about the roots of the rose of life that know the rose, though they may well be authorities on worms. The truth about the rose is its beauty, and for that reason it has ever been the faith of the poet that in the beauty of life there is at once mysti-

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cally hidden and revealed life's very truth as well. The realism of the ugly is negative, the realism of the beautiful is positive, and for that reason the realism of the ugly is passing away; for man lives not by negatives alone, and no literature of negation and misanthropy can long continue to terrorize so human a world. There is too much joy in life, too much that is clearly good and beautiful, and too strong an instinct in man of its mystic import, for him long to endure the books that merely disillusionize or defile. In fact, man cannot be disillusioned, for the simple reason that the intuitions to which he so obstinately clings are not illusions at all; for the man who could call religion and love illusions is merely trifling with words, and might as well deny the force of the tides. Illusions so motive in their power must surely be classed among the realities.

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The "facts of life," of which the realist so often reminds us, are not the simple prosaic outsides of things. The commonest of them rightly seen is full of mysterious suggestion, and all that suggestion is a part of the fact. To miss that and to see only the outsides is surely to misrepresent the facts. It is the highest value of a fact rather than the lowest which it is important for us to see, and it is on that value that the poet is always insisting. That is his service to the community. To raise the veil of familiarity which blinds us to the strangely significant face of life, the regeneration of the world through wonder: for this there are poets still, and will be as long as there is a world to regenerate. And this service is what readers nowadays are more and more looking for to writers of all kinds. Instead of the poet's occupation being gone, he

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was never more in demand; for the temper of the age, paradoxical as the statement may seem upon the surface, is essentially poetic. Its mood of infidel despair and cynical worldliness is passing, and the smug self-confidence of its science is giving way to what one might call a meditative astonishment, not untouched with religion. Far from our having guessed the riddle of things, the riddle itself has gained in mystery and fascination. The facts of life, yes! but what wonderful facts they are!

Such is the growing mood of the time, which, while it tends on the one hand to an ever stricter demand for fidelity in literary material, is even more insistent that the interpretation of that material shall be the poetic interpretation — that is, the interpretation which gives it its highest human value.

Take as an example of what I mean, a much

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read recent story, Mr. Conrad's "Heart of the Darkness," in the volume entitled "Youth." There is nothing particularly novel or attractive in the material: a relief expedition threading its way up a Western African river to bring back a certain Mr. Kurtz, the manager of a Belgian ivory station. African adventure in itself is hardly new enough to be exciting, and much of Mr. Conrad's material is at first sight dreary, and even disagreeable. Yet what a masterpiece he has made of it all, what a marvellous poem — and not by any methods of exaggeration, by nothing that he has added, but by mere dint of *seeing what was there*, seeing *all* that was there, giving every fact its full value, its full human value — and to give a fact its full human value is to give it its poetic value. Nothing is, as we say, "poetized," or in any way fictitiously heightened. Small mat-



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ters remain small, but all, small or great, thrill with the dread significance which inheres in every cubic inch of human life, had we but eyes to see it. Mr. Conrad has the eyes, and like every true poet he writes so wonderfully, because he *sees* so wonderfully. I cannot remember to have read in a book descriptions of scenery that were at once so real, and yet so beautiful. Yet there is no word-painting. It is the fact, clearly seen, closely set down all the time, but remember it is all the fact — that is, all the implicit suggestion of the fact, its spiritual as well as its pictorial value.

If Mr. Conrad were merely a story-teller, and were his yarns even more exciting than they are, one would hardly be writing of him in this way, nor indeed do I think that it is his stories, merely as stories, that account for his recent wide recognition. It is the poetic tem-

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per of his work, which falls in with the general awakening of wonder, that at once gives it its value and its opportunity. I have taken Mr. Conrad as an illustration, rather than any other of the writers I have named, because his material is less superficially poetic than theirs. You would naturally look for romance in a volume of sea yarns, but hardly romance of so significant a quality as Mr. Conrad gives us, romance that so clearly mirrors the spiritual mood of the time. No success could more clearly show which way the wind is blowing, though by signs and wonders on every hand it is very clear that the tide of dreams is once more coming in, and the moon of beauty rising. "Let us go forth, the tellers of tales," cries Mr. Yeats, in "The Celtic Twilight," "and seize whatever prey the heart longs for and have no fear. Everything exists, everything is true,

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and the earth is only a little dust under our feet." This has been the cry of the poet in all times, but to-day it could almost be said to be the cry of us all. A little while ago and the earth seemed all we had. It was our measure of reality. We accepted its laws — its imperfectly apprehended physics — as a court of last appeal. Humbly we surrendered our souls, in obedience to a chemical experiment. To-day, however, the earth is once more "under our feet," and once more we turn our eyes to and put our trust in the stars. Once more we say, fearlessly facing the darkest facts against us: Man is a spirit; he lives not by bread alone; he is *not* as the beasts that perish.

And thus once more we are coming to demand of our books that they shall recognize this dignity in man, this presage of a divine destiny, that, in short, they shall be "humane."

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The day of the literary hooligan is ended, — for the time being at all events, — and the occupation of the bestial pessimist is gone. Once more we demand of our books the loftier and the finer realities of humanity. Once more we demand pity and tenderness and beauty and humour. We have been surfeited with offal and literary butchers-meat, and cleaner appetites reawaken within us. If the new writers are not ready to give us the books we crave, perhaps their failure is not an unmixed misfortune, for thus we shall be driven back to the old great ones, those wells of living water which remain fresh and full through all temporary periods of drought. And there are signs that we are thus returning to those fountain-heads from which such modern writers as I have named are, after all, but little trickling rills. It is becoming the fashion to reread

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Dickens, and there could hardly be a more healthy sign of the times. If only for its goodness of heart, not counting its many other great and brilliant qualities, "David Copperfield" must ever remain one of the great books of the world. Goodness of heart! Yes! that has been quite an unfashionable quality in literature for the last fifteen or twenty years. Hardness of heart has been the vogue. To be hard, and corrupt, and brutal has been the aim of the writer who would write as the wind blew. But, thank heaven, a fresher wind is once more blowing, and Dickens is but one of the many great Victorian writers whom it will repay the present generation to read again. Indeed, we need be in no hurry for new books, for it is hardly too much to say that, if no new book were written for a hundred years, there is more than enough unassimilated virtue in the liter-

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ature of the nineteenth century to meet the most eager spiritual and intellectual demands of our most precocious great-grandchildren. After all, it is not so much the temper of the writers of any given age that matters as the temper of the readers — for if the writers of one's own time fail us, the writers of the older, stronger times are always there upon our shelves. When we cry out for new truth and new beauty, would we not do better to ask ourselves, what use have we made of the old? There is a good deal of poetry still left in Shakespeare, and, with all our æstheticism, have we yet exhausted the beauty of Keats? If our hearts need laughter, are there no more laughs left for us in Aristophanes, and Cervantes, and Fielding, and Dickens, and Mark Twain? And, suppose there were no Mæterlinck, would we quite starve — with Plato?

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No, the reader in earnest need never trouble himself about the shortcomings of his particular generation. The books of his day may be drab and sullen, weary and materialistic, but he has only to turn to his shelves to find books of another generation full of colour and spirit, cheerful books, books ashine with youth and shaking with laughter, books inhabited by dreams, and grave with messages for the soul. Perhaps it might be well for the contemporary writer to be more urgently reminded that his most important rivals are not his contemporaries, and that his own generation, if needs be, can very well do without him.





WHAT'S THE USE OF POETRY?

*And idly tuneſul, the loquacious throng  
Flutter and twitter, prodigal of time,  
And little maſters make a toy of ſong  
Till grave men weary of the ſound of rhyme.*

WILLIAM WATSON in "*Wordsworth's Grave.*"

### III

**T**HERE is no doubt that the majority of people are firmly convinced that they do not care for poetry. They have no use for it, they tell you. Either it bores them, as a fantastic, high-flown method of saying something that, to their way of thinking, could be better said in plain prose, or they look upon it as the sentimental nonsense of the moonstruck, lovesick young; a kind of intellectual "candy" all very well for women and children, but of no value to grown men with the serious work of the world on their shoulders.

It is not at all difficult to account for, and indeed to sympathize with, this attitude. To

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begin with, of course, there is a large class outside our present consideration which does not care for poetry simply because it does not care for any literature whatsoever. Serious reading of any kind does not enter into its scheme of life. Beyond the newspapers, an occasional novel of the hour, idly taken up, indifferently put aside, it has no literary needs. With this listless multitude we have not to concern ourselves, but rather with that sufficiently heretogeneous body known as the reading public, the people for whom Mr. Carnegie builds the libraries, and the publishers display their wares. Of course, among these there must necessarily be a considerable percentage temperamentally unappreciative of poetry, — just as there are numbers of people born with no ear for music, and numbers again born with no colour sense. The lover of

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poetry is no less born than the poet himself. Yet, as the poet is made as well as born, so is his reader. There are many who really love poetry without knowing it, many who think they do not care for poetry, — either because they have contracted a wrong notion of what poetry is, or because they have some time or other made a bad start with the wrong kind of poetry.

I am convinced that one widespread provocative of the prevailing impression of the foolishness of poetry is the mediocre magazine verse of the day. In an age when we go so much to the magazines for our reading, we may rely on finding there the best work being done in every branch of literature except — the highest. The best novelists, the best historians, and the best essayists write for the magazines, but the best poets must be looked for in their high-priced volumes; a magazine

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reader must rely for his verse on lady amateurs and tuneful college boys. Thus he too often approaches poetry, not through the great masters but — the little misses; he forms his naturally contemptuous notion of poetry upon feeble echoes and insipid imitations. No wonder, therefore, that he should refuse to waste his good eyesight on anything in the shape of verse, should conceive of poetry as a mild mental dissipation for young ladies, a sickly sweetmeat made of molasses and moonshine. If the magazine editors of the world would only bind themselves to publish no verse except the best, and, failing to obtain a contemporary supply of the best, would fill their spare corners of space with reprints of the old fine things, I am convinced that they would do a great deal toward rectifying this widespread misconception of an art which, far from being trivial and super-

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ficial, is of all the arts the most serious, the most vitally human. I am not saying that all poetry is for all readers. There is a section of poetry known as "poet's poetry," which, of necessity, can only appeal to those in whom the sense of beauty, of verbal exquisiteness, has become specialized. Spenser and Keats, for example, are poets of the rainbow. For the average reader their poems are the luxuries rather than the necessities of literature, — though, in making so rough and ready a distinction, it must not be forgotten that beauty, happily, is becoming more and more a general necessity; nor must it be forgotten, either, that rainbows, refined and remote as they are, belong also to the realities. It is *the reality of poetry* that I wish, if possible, to bring home to readers in this article. "Some flowers," says George Meredith, "have roots

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deep as oaks.” Poetry is one of those flowers. Instead of its being a superficial decoration of life, it is, rightly understood, the organic expression of life’s deepest meaning, the essence in words of human dreams and human action. It is the truth of life told beautifully, — and yet truthfully.

There is only one basis for the longevity of human forms. That basis is reality. No other form of human expression has continued with such persistent survival from the beginning until now as poetry — from the “Iliad” to “The Absent-Minded Beggar.” It and the wild flowers, for all their adventurous fragility, are as old, and no less stable, than the hills, — and for the same reason, — because they are no less real. The world is apt to credit prose with a greater reality than poetry; but the truth is that the prose of life is only



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real in proportion as it is vitalized by that spirit of poetry that breathes in all created things.

Life exacts practical reasons for the survival of all its forms of expression, and unless poetry served some practical purpose of existence, it would long since have perished. It is because poetry has a practical work to do in the world that it continues, and will continue, to exist; because it is one of the motive forces of the universe, — life's motive meaning, one might almost say, — the nerve force of existence.

A great man has defined it as "the finer spirit of all knowledge;" the phrase, though limited, may help us to a broader, deeper apprehension of poetry, and help us to say, too, that poetry is the finer spirit of all impulse, the finer meaning of all achievement. There is no human interest desiring to be displayed

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in all its essential vividness that does not realize the value of a poetical expression.

Those who would depreciate the power of poetry in the sternest practical affairs have only to be reminded how much modern Imperialism owes to Mr. Kipling; and it is by no means trivial to remark that the most successful advertisements have been in verse. So soon as "poetry," so-called, really is poetry, its appeal is immediately admitted, its force undeniably felt. It is the false poets who account for the false ideas of poetry. One has only to confront a "practical man" with the real thing to convince him that, without realizing it, he has cared a great deal about poetry all his life. Probably he has imagined that his great stumbling-block has been the verse. "Why not say it in plain English?" he has impatiently exclaimed, — thinking all the time

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of bad verse, of lifeless contorted rhyming, of those metrical inanities of the magazines; and yet, when you bring him a verse that is really alive, in which the metre is felt to be the very life-beat of the thought, you don't find him asking to have it turned into prose. How about "Mandalay" in prose, for example, or that old bugle-call of Scott's:—

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife!  
To all the sensual world proclaim,  
One crowded hour of glorious life  
Is worth an age without a name.

Or Tennyson's "Tears, idle tears," or Coleridge's:—

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

Or "The quality of mercy is not strained," or

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“Under the greenwood tree,” or Mr. Swinburne’s: —

Ask nothing more of me, sweet;  
All I can give you I give.  
Heart of my heart, were it more,  
More would be laid at your feet:  
Love that should help you to live,  
Song that should spur you to soar.

In all these cases the verse is immediately felt to be the very life of the expression, — for the reason that it echoes in words the life-rhythms to which unconsciously all such human emotions keep time. Say it in prose! Can you say a trumpet in prose, or a tear, or a butterfly? If you can, your prose is really poetry, and will be found to be eloquent with sunken rhythms, not immediately obvious to the ear and eye.

The first thing to realize about poetry is that the metre *is* the meaning, — even more than

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the words. In the just quoted "Tears, idle tears," for example, it is not so much the words that are accountable for the wistful sorrow of the general effect as the sad rain-like melody mysteriously charging the words with sorrow, like some beautiful interpretative voice; and it is this subtly mimetic quality, endlessly adaptable, which is the *raison d'être* of metre, and the secret of its power over mankind.

Perhaps it may help us to attempt here a definition of poetry, — though it is a bold, even foolhardy, thing to do, for there has never yet been a definition of poetry that satisfied anyone but the man who made it. We may recall one fashionable in its day, Matthew Arnold's "Poetry is a criticism of life." That a poet should have made such a narrowing definition is amazing, though one of course understands it, in the light of the fact that the inspiration

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of Matthew Arnold's muse was almost entirely that of a philosophical criticism of life. Far from being a criticism of life, poetry is much more like a *re-creation* of it. It is life — in words. But let me timidly launch my own definition: —

*Poetry is that impassioned arrangement of words (whether in verse or prose) which embodies the exaltation, the beauty, the rhythm, and the pathetic truth of life.*

There is a motive idealism behind all human action of which most of us are unconscious, or to which we ordinarily give but little thought, a romance of impulse which is the real significance of human effort. The walls of Thebes were built to music according to the old story, — but so were the walls of every other city that has ever been built. The sky-scrapers of New York are soaring to music also, — a masterful

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music of the future, which not all can hear, and of which perhaps the music-makers themselves are most ignorant of all. Once more in Emerson's immortal phrase, the builders are building better than they know, — these ruthless speculators, stern business-men, who are the last to suspect themselves of the poetry which they involuntarily serve.

Human life, in the main, is thus unconsciously poetical, and moves to immortal measures of a mysterious spiritual music. It is this impassioned exaltation, this strange rhythm, this spiritual beauty, — “the finer spirit” of life, — which the poet seizes on, and expresses therewith, also, that pathos which seems to inhere in all created things. We read him because he gives that value to life which we feel belongs to it, but for which we are unable to find the words ourselves. How often one has heard

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people say, on reading a poem: "Why, that is just what I have always felt, but could never express!" — and the exclamation was obviously a recognition of *the truth* of the poem. The poet had made a true observation, and recorded it with all vividness of truth. It is the business of the poet to be all the time thus recording, and re-creating, life in all its manifestations, not only for those who already possess something of the poetic vision, yet lack the poet's utterance, but also for those who need to be awakened to the ideal meanings and issues of life. Poetry is thus seen to be a kind of lay religion, revealing and interpreting the varied beauty and nobility of life.

But a better way than theorizing to show the "use" — the sweet uses — of poetry is to call up the names of some of the great poets, and ponder what they have meant, and still mean, in



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the life of humanity, — Dante, Milton, and Wordsworth for example; and to them we might add Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold. How much these six poets alone have meant to the graver life of humanity: the life of religion, of thought, of conduct! Particularly with regard to the four poets of the last century we are compelled to note how, far more than any professed teachers and thinkers, they were the teachers and thinkers of their age, and did indeed mould the thought of their centuries. For how many have Wordsworth's "Prelude," Tennyson's "In Memoriam," Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra," and Matthew Arnold's "Empedocles" been literally sacred books, books of daily exercise and meditation, — to name only a few of their more typical poems. They are well-worn to-day, but think what forces in the world these lines of Wordsworth have been: —

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The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our  
powers:

Little we see in nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

Or these of Tennyson: —

Are God and Nature then at strife,  
That Nature lends such evil dreams?  
So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life;

That I, considering everywhere  
Her secret meaning in her deeds,  
And finding that of fifty seeds  
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,  
And falling with my weight of cares  
Upon the great world's altar-stairs  
That slope through darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of fate, and grope,  
And gather dust and chaff, and call  
To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope.

Or these of Browning: —

Not on the vulgar mass  
Called "work" must sentence pass,

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But all the world's coarse thumb  
And finger failed to plumb,  
So passed in making up the main account;  
All instincts immature,  
All purposes unsure,  
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the  
man's account:  
Thought hardly to be packed  
Into a narrow act,  
Fancies that broke through language and  
escaped;  
All I could never be,  
All men ignored in me,  
This I was worth to God, whose wheel the  
pitcher shaped.

And, finally, these of Matthew Arnold: —

Is it so small a thing  
To have enjoyed the sun,  
To have lived light in the spring,  
To have loved, to have thought, to have done;  
To have advanced true friends, and beat down  
baffling foes;

That we must feign a bliss  
Of doubtful future date,  
And, while we dream on this,  
Lose all our present state,  
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose?

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These lines, and many more like them that one could quote, have done definite spiritual service for mankind, have inspired countless men and women with new faith, new hope, and new fortitude, and will remain permanent springs of sustenance for the human spirit.

Again, the mere mention of such names as Goethe, Byron, and Shelley carries with it their tremendous significance in the "practical" life of the modern world. When we think of such figures as occur over and over again in the history of poetry, we realize that Tennyson's "one poor poet's scroll" that "shook the world" was no mere boyish inflation of the poet's mission. That sad musical poet Arthur O'Shaughnessy said no more than the truth when he sang, — in verse like the motion of moonlight on water: —

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We are the music-makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams,  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,  
And sitting by desolate streams;  
World-losers and world-forsakers,  
On whom the pale moon gleams:  
Yet we are the movers and shakers  
Of the world forever, it seems.

To realize what a sheerly political force poetry has been in America alone, one has only to recall the poems of Whittier and Lowell, and Julia Ward Howe's immortal "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

But, apart from such stern services, how many other services no less valuable has poetry rendered to mankind, — services of joy and universal sympathy! The poet, often so sad himself, sings all men's joys and sorrows as if they were his own; there is nothing that can happen to us, nothing we can experience, no stroke of fate, and no mood of heart or mind,

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that we cannot find expressed and interpreted for us somewhere in some poet's book. Take but one poet, — Robert Burns, for instance, — think of the immense addition to the sum-total of human pleasure and human consolation that his handful of Scotch songs has made. Who asks, "What's the use of poetry?" when he joins in "Auld lang syne," and feels his heart stirred to its tearful depths with the sentiment of human brotherhood, and the almost tragic dearness of friends. And who that has ever been in love has not once in his life felt the brotherly hand of a fellow experience in —

Had we never loved sae kindly,  
Had we never loved sae blindly,  
Never met, — or never parted, —  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted, —

and been consoled somehow with that mysterious consolation which belongs to the perfect expression of sorrow.

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If the simple songs of a Scotch peasant have been of so much "use" to the world, what of that lordly pleasure-house of Shakespeare ? Think of the boundless universe of mere delight that has written over its door, "The Works of Shakespeare,"—the laughter, the wisdom, the beauty, the all-comprehending humanity.

If it be of no use to make men happy, to quicken in them the joy of life, to heighten their pleasures, to dry their tears, to bind up their wounds ; if it be of no use to teach them wisdom, to open their eyes, to purify and direct their spirits, to gird them to fight, to brace them to endure, to teach them to be gentle ; then, indeed, we may well ask, "What's the use of poetry ?"—But, while poetry can do all these things, I think it must be allowed by the most practical that it has a very important part to play in the work of the world.

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To end, as I began, with that practical man who imagines that he does not care for poetry — I gave one or two explanations of his distaste, but there is one other important one that must not be forgotten. He begins too often with “Paradise Lost.” I mean that he too often attempts some tough classic, before he is ready for it; and, because he cannot read Milton with pleasure, imagines that he does not care for poetry at all. Thus he finds himself bewildered by the insipid magazine muses on the one hand, and the unscalable immortals on the other. Too many make the famous Mr. Boffin’s mistake by beginning the study of English literature with Gibbon’s “Decline and Fall”; and what wonder if a man beginning the study of English poetry with Browning’s “Sordello” should imagine, like Douglas Jerrold in the story, either that his mind was failing him, or



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that there was something radically wrong with the poet! Actually a man may love poetry very deeply, yet care nothing at all for "Paradise Lost." He may also find nothing for him in Homer or Æschylus or Dante or Goethe. The great architectural works of such masters may seem too godlike and grim for his gentler human need. But give him a handful of violets from Ophelia's grave, or a bunch of Herrick's daffodils, or take him out under the sky where Shelley's lark is singing, or try him with a lyric of Heine's, or some ballad of —

. . old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago, —

and you will see whether or not he loves poetry.

The mistake is in thinking that all poetry is for all readers. On the contrary, the realm of poetry is as wide as the world, for the very reason that each man may find there just what he

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needs, and leave the rest. The thing is to discover the poetry that is meant for us. Perhaps the best way to do that is to turn over the pages of some well-made selection, and see where our eyes get caught and held. Palgrave's "Golden Treasury" is, of course, the classical anthology, a little volume filled with the purest gold of English lyrical poetry. If a man should read in that for an hour, and find nothing to his taste, it is to be feared that he was born deaf to the sweet rippling of the Pierian spring. But, as I have said, I believe that few have been so hardly treated by nature. "A poet died young in every one of us," said some one. I think he did not so much die as fall asleep, nor is he so fast asleep but that the right song sung aright would awaken him.

What is the use of poetry? It is just the whole use of living, — and let anyone who

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doubts it buy "The Golden Treasury," and enter the garden for himself.

Ay, come ye hither to this pleasant land,  
For here in truth are vines of Engaddi,  
Here golden urns of manna to thy hand,  
And rocks whence honey flows deliciously;  
Udders from which comes frothing copiously  
The milk of life, ears filled with sweetest grains,  
And fig trees knowing no sterility;  
Here Paradisal streams make rich the plains,  
O! come and bathe therein, ye world-worn  
weary swains.



WHAT AN UNREAD MAN  
SHOULD READ

*“ No profit is where is no pleasure ta'en :  
In brief, sir, study what you most affect.”*

SHAKESPEARE.

## IV

**I**N answering this question, which is sometimes put to one, I shall assume that the “unread man” is a man of fair commercial education who has had little time or opportunity for reading, but is anxious, with such leisure as he enjoys, to make a beginning. It is obvious that one’s advice must be mainly general, and, only in a very limited degree, particular. It would be easy to answer the question academically, and, with a list of forbidding classics, frighten away the timid seeker. Thus many a man has missed the way to the pleasant gardens of the Muses, awed by stern presences speaking unknown tongues at the gates.

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Or, one might answer it according to his taste, and prescribe a diet of his own favorite authors.

Or, again, one might bid the unread man read what he has a mind to: "In brief, sir, study what you most affect"; and, if the unread man has sufficient leisure, perhaps the best way would be to turn him loose in a library to forage for himself, relying upon his own instinct to find for him his own food. Many fine minds have been nourished on this principle, and it is a principle which it is of the first importance to take into account in answering this question. No one can help a reader who is not able to help himself even more.

At the same time, it is possible, in a general way, allowing for all differences of tastes, for one who knows and loves books to help another who is but beginning to love them, and is won-



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deringly standing on the threshold of that temple of humanity which we call a library. How much time one would have saved when he was young, how many fruitless wanderings in by-ways that led nowhere, how many wrong turnings, how much stupid, unproductive labor he would have avoided, if there had only been a wisely read friend at his shoulder, who knew both books and his friend, to say, "You needn't trouble about that!" or, "There is nothing there for you," or, "Have a try at this book, and see how it hits you, my friend!"

Such a friend might, of course, lead one astray occasionally, and no human being can know exactly another's natural way among books; but such a friend would, unquestionably, have saved one much expense of spirit, and rescued him from many a bad model and dull, unprofitable volume.

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Among the few general counsels which I venture humbly to offer on this matter, the first and most important for the unread man to remember is this: Beware of literary superstition. Naturally, the timid seeker whom I have in mind is liable to feel a little awed before enthroned literary authority. In a sense, it is the proper attitude for a beginner, but it must be accompanied by a courageous adherence to his own impressions. For example, if some one has advised you to read the "Iliad," and you cannot, for the life of you, see anything in it, while, at the same time, you are shamefully conscious that it is a "classic," and that it is your moral duty to enjoy it in spite of yourself, — the thing to do is to be perfectly honest with yourself, and put Homer by, — at all events, for the time. The day may come when, through the changes wrought in your taste by

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various other reading, you may enjoy Homer, after all, and realize why so many generations of men have delighted in him, — why, in short, his works are classic.

Meanwhile, however, there is no use in your trying to feel what you do not feel; for reading is nothing if not sincere, and its profit is not easily separable from its pleasure. I have taken the “Iliad” merely as an example of those world-famous books which, gathered from every branch of literature, compose the heterogeneous assemblage of the immortals, and all of which the bewildered unread man, when he takes his first respectful look at their embattled names on the bookshelf, superstitiously feels it his mighty responsibility to digest.

He is not, as yet, in a position to discriminate between such superior beings as “standard

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authors," or to realize that while, in a sense, both "Don Quixote" and the "Wealth of Nations" are "classics," they are classics so different in character and importance that one he certainly should not miss, and the other no one need read again as long as the world lasts. One is a book that will keep the world's heart warm with laughter forever; the other is an able treatise on economics, of value, of course, to the technical student, but so far as it concerns the general reader, accessible to him in the handier manuals of briefer and later writers.

Many such epoch-making books in science and philosophy, and even history, may thus be set aside by the unread man, — unless, of course, he proposes to become a specialist in any of those branches of study; and, of course, the specialist I am not presuming to advise: such books, for example, as those grim pres-

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ences on our grandfather's shelves,—“Locke on the Human Understanding,” Bacon's “*Novum Organum*,” Kant's “Critique of Pure Reason,” the vital essences of which have passed into later thinkers and are summed up in a few labor-saving pages in, say, Lewes's attractive “History of Philosophy”; or such dry superseded histories as those of Hallam; books which seem to keep their places in our libraries by sheer obstinacy, or the misguided charity of those librarians who would seem to consider a library as a home for dull and decayed authors.

I conceive that the business of the unread man is with the living classics in the world's literature, not with those books whose work is done,—the embalmed ancestors of modern thought; and here, of course, he has, indeed, the world before him, and the question where

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to begin may well puzzle him. How, from this vast storehouse, shall he choose that which will best nourish his spirit, build up his mind, make his character, and be most suitable generally to his own individual development? For I am assuming that the aim of our average un-read man is neither mere pleasure on the one hand, nor mere knowledge on the other. In addition to wishing to know, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, "the best that has been thought and said in the world," he wishes to laugh with the great laughers, dream with the great dreamers, and do with the great doers. It is a broad human culture he seeks, the means of which is knowledge, and the process of which is pleasure.

Of course, the conventional counsel would be: Let him read the best. That the best in literature, as in life generally, is best for us,

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there can be no disputing. But the difficulty is that the taste for the best is not always instinctive, and that our unread man might well, at first, find the best somewhat stern and unattractive food. He has to be coaxed into appreciating it. Mark Pattison once said that an appreciation of Milton is one of the last rewards of a ripe and strenuous scholarship. The remark was somewhat bigotedly academical,—for, surely, one may enjoy Milton's earlier poems, particularly (and perhaps they are his best), without any more scholarship than is necessary to enjoy a bird's singing, — yet it is true, as an extreme example of the truth, that the taste for the best in literature, while it must be born in us, has to be made as well.

The mere taste for reading itself, the mere undisciplined appetite for printed matter of

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any kind, is, of course, the indispensable basis. As soon as anyone loves reading, — for reading's sake, — and has formed a habit of devouring any books that come his way, the chances are that the passion will refine itself, in the end, and the man who began, maybe, with detective novels ends with a fine appreciation of Shakespeare. Perhaps the best way for the unread man to form a habit of reading is to begin with novels. But, by this method, the effort to begin with the best need not, surely, be too arduous. Here, at least, it is not the classics, but their cheap imitators, which are dull and wearisome. If, as I was saying, you approach literature by the gate of the detective novel, why not begin with the best? Why waste your time, as the advertisers say, on "worthless imitations"? No detective novel of our generation is worthy to



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be mentioned with Wilkie Collins's "The Moonstone"; and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" was the father of them all.

So it is with the historical novel. For several years we have been suffering from a prolonged epidemic of the imitation historical novel. Here and there has been produced a respectable dramatization of local history, but it is almost astonishing to think that a literary fashion could have prevailed for so long without producing a single book of even moderate importance. When one thinks of all that splendid dream-world of Dumas, and of such single books as Charles Reade's "The Cloister and the Hearth", or the too little known "Sidonia, the Sorceress" of Meinhold; or recalls even Shorthouse's "John Inglesant," it is almost inconceivable that a public can be found

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for the pasteboard and tinsel imitations which congest the bookshops, except on the supposition that the public buys the imitation in ignorance of the real.

Then, if you seek the novel for laughter and tears, for poignant presentation or subtle analysis of the human story, where *can* you go, except to those writers who are already classic, or to such living writers as are fast becoming so? No one has written a really amusing book since Mark Twain stopped writing — amusing books; and no one else has ever done them quite as well as Charles Dickens. A short time ago it was the fashion to sneer at Dickens; but that fashion, too, is passing, and Dickens remains, as he must always remain, one of the eternal comforts of the human spirit. The other day, I came upon a little girl of about twelve years laughing over a book as if

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her heart would break. I asked about the book, but she could hardly tell me the title for laughing. It was the "Pickwick Papers!" Did I know it? It was a new book for her, — though, alas! I have myself been familiar with it for quite a while, — as it will be a new book for her great-grandchildren and their children.

An unread man, therefore, cannot afford to miss Dickens, any more than he can afford to miss Fielding and Sterne and Scott and Jane Austen and Thackeray and George Eliot and George Meredith and Thomas Hardy, — to name only English writers. To speak of the great continental writers he can even less afford to neglect would make this article too much of a catalogue. Cervantes and Balzac and Victor Hugo and Dumas and Tolstoi must be named. When he has read those, all the other lesser writers one might name will be added unto

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him. He will need no one's advice by the time he is through with Balzac.

There are many American authors whose books should not be omitted from the shelves of an unread man. Chief among them I may name those of Washington Irving, Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russell Lowell, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Bret Harte.

The obvious advantage of beginning with the novel, aside from its providing a pleasant introduction to the reading habit, is that more and more the novel is coming to absorb all other branches of literature into itself. In addition to its own proper business of providing us with imaginative pleasure, it is already doing the work of the theatre, the church, the philosopher, the poet. The real plays that

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thrill us with their human drama are no longer on the stage, but in the pages of our novels; and, when a writer wishes to discuss a spiritual and moral problem through the medium by which he may best reach the audience concerned, he chooses the novel. From the beginning, mankind has been best pleased to be taught in parables, but the parable has never before been so inclusive and so authoritative a vehicle as it is in our time.

The novel, therefore, becomes, more and more, an index of the life of mankind, and an introduction to general culture. At the same time, while it may provide us with vivid illustrations of history, it can never take the place of real history, any more than, however it may appeal to that sense of romance and beauty which is so much of poetry, it can take the place of poetry. Just so an organ combines all

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instruments, yet it can never be a substitute for the violin. As an introduction, however, to the pleasant gardens of knowledge, I repeat that the novel is of inestimable value. It is the laughing decoy of literature. An unread man has only to read a very few of the great representative novels to find where he stands, what his tastes are likely to be, and what it is that he is looking for in books. If his temperament is for what Theophile Gautier called "the drab" in human life, the exact, untransformed picture of human existence, unrain-bowed by romance, unsanctified by emotion, it will evidently not be to poetry that the novel will lead him. If the bent of his mind is philosophical, the philosophical novel will send him to the fountain-head of the great philosophers, as the make-believe of the historical novel will send him to the pages of history.

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Perhaps, of all studies, the study of the first importance to an average citizen is the study of history. The reading of history is a sort of mental travel. Just as a man who has seen no other country but his own is apt to be provincial in his ideas, unintelligently patriotic and intolerant of "the foreigner" he has never met, so the man who knows no history is limited in his perspective, and comprehends as little the meaning of the contemporary history forming every moment around him as a peasant does the issue of a presidential election. We read history, not so much to be informed about the past, as to understand the present. We will, of course, begin with the history of our own nation, and we shall have gone but a little way in that without coming to see how that study necessitates our reading the history of other nations, so complex is the process of historic

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evolution; so indissolubly related is one nation to another in spite of international jealousies and cruel wars! Our national pride may not be abated by this survey, but it will be the more intelligently supported, and we shall have come to realize at least that, though we are undoubtedly the greatest nation on the earth, we are not the only one.

Apart from this general gain in mental expansiveness, into what fascinating byways of human experience will the study of history lead one! So much has been done in this world, so many lives so richly and bravely lived, that we know nothing of, until we take up some old history and find a mere name turning to a living man or woman, working, loving, fighting, just as we, maybe, are doing; and the spectacle brings one a curious inspiration and comfort, while it deepens and broadens our humanity



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as no other study can so well do as the study of history.

Perhaps the best way to read history is to take up the life of some figure that attracts our imagination, and be drawn by that into the study of the general stage upon which he was only a single actor. Certainly it is not a good plan to begin with those elaborate documentary histories in which you cannot see the wood for the trees. It is better to be wrong in a few of your facts, or even contract a bias from some partisan historian, than to lose yourself in a morass of documents. The best histories are the vividest. If they occasionally lead you astray, you can always correct them by the more sober-coloured chronicles. Macaulay may have been prejudiced, and so may Froude, and so, undoubtedly, was Carlyle; so, again, was Gibbon; yet, none the less, these are the great

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historians, the historians who set you upon the peaks of time, and enable you to see history as it lies beneath in wide views and broad masses.

Philosophy and science are the two branches of study, perhaps, next in importance for the average reader; man's progressive interpretation of his own soul, and his latest discoveries in, and guesses at, the nature of the mysterious universe in which he finds himself. Here, again, the unread man will be wise not to weary and bewilder himself with first-hand technical authorities, — unless, of course, he means to become a technical student of philosophy or of science. For example, Spinoza has had, perhaps, the greatest of all influences on modern thought, yet the "Ethics" is incomprehensible to anyone not specially trained in philosophical study. All most of us need to understand Spinoza is Frederick Pollock's ad-

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mirable study, and that will be found sufficiently to tax the attention.

Similarly, in regard to science, such books as Darwin's "Origin of Species" are written for scientists, not for the general reader; and their results are to be found in many easily accessible handbooks. In science, at least, the middleman, the lucid expositor of abstruse subjects, is more than justified, and, happily, there are many such in every branch of science.

On poetry it seems particularly vain to offer advice. The lover of poetry is born no less than the poet, and, I fear, he cannot be made. An unread man is apt to be cynical about the uses of poetry. To him it seems a frippery, a rather effeminate ornament of life; instead of being, as, of course, it actually is, the fine flower of its vital essence. An unread man has, it is true, much good reason for his view, for verse

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has too often been made a mere toy of, and may well seem to him a sugary medium for silly sentiment. He's wrong, of course, but how can we convince him? Here, indeed, there is only one way — the best. He must read the best poetry — no second best will do. He needn't begin with Dante, or even Shakespeare; but let him try Burns, or Hood, or Kipling, — poets who talk the familiar speech of men, and not the more hieratic speech of the muse. If he enjoys them, he may come to enjoy their greater fellows, and other kinds of poetry. But, as you may bring the horse to the water, *et cætera*, so it is with the man who is not born to love poetry. Poetry is the one thing you have to find out for yourself, and, if you really want it, you always find it.

HOW TO FORM A  
LIBRARY

*What are my books? My friends, my loves,  
My church, my tavern and my only wealth;  
My garden; yes, my flowers, my bees, my  
doves;  
My only doctors — and my only health.*

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE.

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*“And if it were so that I must be a Prisoner, if I might have my wish, I would desire to have no other prison than that library [the Bodleian], and to be chained together with so many good authors.”*

James I, quoted in BURTON'S *Anatomy of Melancholy*.

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THERE are many readers who do not feel the need of possessing books for themselves. A subscription to a good lending library serves their purpose, and often the most omnivorous and intelligent readers belong to this class. When once they have mastered the contents of a book, or exhausted its entertainment, they have no further need of it. It is to them so much oyster shell; and this, too, is their way not only with books of the passing hour, few of which seem intended for permanent possession, but also with the classics and familiars of literature. They don't feel the need of possessing even a Shakespeare, and one can easily imagine their

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reading the Bible in a lending library copy: "Three weeks allowed for reading this book." Some readers, I say, are born this way. One might describe them as deficient in the home-sense as applied to books, perhaps deficient, too, in the quality of friendship. For to another class of readers it seems indeed that some books are only to be made really one's own on a friends-for-life basis, and on condition of their being housed and domesticated with us. You cannot really read Milton in a borrowed copy, or enjoy the exquisite companionship of Charles Lamb in the spirit of a quick lunch. As you have to live with people to know them, so you have to live with the real books, — at least some readers have, the readers I have in mind as I write.

One is sometimes asked, by young readers, how best to set about the formation of a library.



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As a matter of fact, I think the born book-lover finds that a library has a way of beginning itself, and that, looking back, he can hardly recall how his library began, or remember a time when a certain number of books was not, so to speak, a part of his natural outfit. But actually, of course, a library, like all other human things, must have a beginning somewhere. Unless we order our books by the yard, or buy a library ready-made from a bookseller, there must be the first book, — the one that is to prove the foundation stone of the house of books we propose to build for ourselves. The first book we bought! I wonder how many of us can remember it. And our first modest bookshelf! What important things they were, and how genuinely interesting! Not unlikely our first books were gifts from friends, — and there, by the way, is one good

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method of beginning a library. Let your present-bearing friends know about your taste for books, and, when they show a disposition to make you a present, gently hint that you would like to take it in the form of a book, — but be careful, if possible, to choose your book! For there is no Dead Sea fruit more bitter than the gift-book that you can not read, and that it hurts you to place on your shelf, a meaningless intruder. In this way, one can sometimes acquire a treasure for one's little library otherwise out of the reach of one's slender means, — for it seems to be a law of nature that most book-lovers are poor people. This being admitted as an axiom with which to start, it is of importance that the would-be library-builder wastes as little as possible of his available cash on mere experiment. He needs to be certain, before he buys a book, that he will want to

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keep it. Here he will find the lending library an invaluable aid to him. By means of its catalogues and privileges he may prospect the entire world of books, new and old, and carefully sample any he is prompted to buy, before actually making his purchase; for it may well happen that certain great books of the world, which he might be tempted to buy offhand on their fame value, will prove of no service or appeal to him. Lists of the best hundred books are apt to be misleading in this way. They usually, for example, include Confucius: — yet, great teacher as he was, I don't believe you want to buy his writings; though, of course, you may. There is the difficulty of advice; and that is why, again, it is dangerous to buy books offhand on the recommendation of a friend. The library is going to be *your* library, — and no one else's, — and it is to be so se-

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lected as sensitively to reflect your own personal tastes and needs, and no one else's.

Again, it must be understood that a living library is not to be deliberately made. It grows. You cannot plan it out on paper and then buy it *en bloc*. Of course, you can make a collection of books in that way, but a collection of books is not a library. A bookstore is a collection of books, but it is not a library. A library is an organism, developing side by side with the mind and character of its owner. It is the house of his spirit, and is thus furnished progressively in accordance with the progress of his mental life.

Then, one book naturally leads to another by unforeseen laws or accidents of association. We will suppose, for example, that you have decided to begin your library with Lamb's "Essays of Elia," and I cannot imagine a

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library better begun. Supposing, too, that you find Lamb the sympathetic, friendly writer most properly constituted readers have found him, you will not have gone far before you will find him awakening your curiosity about certain book-cronies of his, and you will probably be inquiring at your lending library for Sir Thomas Browne's "*Religio Medici*," or Sir Philip Sidney's "*Sonnets*," or Izaak Walton's "*Compleat Angler*," and I should be surprised if your reading of Lamb did not end in your adding those three rarely delightful writers to your bookshelf. While you would probably not follow Lamb in all his bookish whims, and would find that you have no use for his "*Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle*," or even Burton's "*Anatomy of Melancholy*," still, it would be strange if his passion for the old Elizabethan dramatists did not lead you to look up Marlowe and

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Webster and Ford and Dekker for yourself. There, at a bound, you are knee-deep in the flowery meadows of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. You might well decide, with many good judges, that Lamb, in the ardour of discovery, overestimated the secondary and lesser Elizabethans. You might find that they do not appeal to you at all, or only here and there. In the latter case, Lamb, himself, has anticipated your need, by his finely selected "Specimens," one of the masterpieces of critical anthology which might well find a place on your shelf. Lamb, too, would naturally introduce you to his own contemporary intimates, and you could not read him and miss wanting to know more about Wordsworth and Coleridge and Hazlitt. So one real book is vitally related to the cosmos of literature, and spreads its roots about the whole globe of knowledge,

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and its branches into the farthest heaven of art.

Perhaps, indeed, the briefest formula of advice to those about to form a library would be: begin with a copy of Lamb's "Essays of Elia," and then await developments. Of course, it might happen that Lamb's charm is not for you. Then you must begin somewhere else. I might almost say, begin anywhere. You might, for instance, begin with perhaps the most fascinating history ever written, — John Richard Green's "Short History of the English People." There is a book with roots and branches, if you like! It is a book that would probably attract more companions on your shelf than any other book I could name, and books, too, of the most comprehensive diversity: historians, philosophers, politicians, poets, dramatists, and novelists, — every kind of

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writer that has illustrated the various life of man. Or still another excellent germinal book would be Macaulay's "Essays." Superior persons may tell you that Macaulay is played out. Don't you believe them. Read the essays for yourself, and you will see. There is still no more live book of its kind in English. You may need to correct his facts by other historians. Curiously enough, it is always the great historians that need to have their facts corrected. It is the little historians that are always accurate, — the truth being that it is the spirit of history that matters, not the small details. The facts of history, by the very nature of evidence, can never be absolutely accurate. It is the imaginative presentation and interpretation of facts that we ask from a historian. Therefore, I say, read Macaulay and Carlyle and Froude. You might do worse



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than start your library with Froude's "Lectures on the Life and Times of Erasmus," — another book with windows open on every side to the infinity of human life and human history.

Assuming that, in one way or another, you have made a start with your library, one question will very soon arise for your decision: are your authors to be represented in their completeness, in the monumental entirety of "sets," and, if not, how far are you going to rest satisfied, or may you venture to rest satisfied, with "selections"? This is a question into which, obviously, material, as well as literary, conditions must enter. How much money have you to spend on books? How much room have you for storing them? Old fourteenth-century Richard de Bury, in his delightful treatise on the love of books, the "Philobiblon," has a

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chapter on "What We Are to Think of the Price in the Buying of Books." In this he declares "that no dearness of price ought to hinder a man from the buying of books," but he adds, with something of anti-climax, — "if he has the money that is demanded for them!" Ah, there's the rub. Unfortunately, "the money that is demanded for them" is quite a consideration; and, as the great writers are usually the most voluminous, their "collected works" not only cost money, but they take up a great deal of room. If you want a complete Carlyle, a complete Dickens, a complete Thackeray, — you are well on to a hundred volumes before you know where you are. Of course, if you've the money and the room for them, you will be unwillingly content with less than their complete achievement. Yet it has often happened with great writers, one might

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almost say it has usually happened, that from the mass of their entire product there stands out one or two books which concentrate all the rest, and which, in a library restricted in size, may suffice to represent their writers. Take Carlyle, for example. If you have three of his books on your shelves, you practically have Carlyle. I mean, if you have “Sartor Resartus,” “Heroes,” and “The French Revolution.” Of course, it’s a pity to miss the rest, and, perhaps, in any case, we should say four, and include “Past and Present.” Also, one cannot claim to know Carlyle, in the whole of his contradictory nature, without reading his “Latter-Day Pamphlets.” But these, and other books of his, we can read in a library copy, — we will hardly feel the need of possessing them. Another great prose-writer will lend himself still more readily to selection, — De Quincey.

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His collected works run to some sixteen closely printed volumes, and the volumes are all packed, more or less, with good reading; but all that really counts in De Quincey is "The Confessions of an Opium-Eater" and a few related papers of reminiscence, easily contained in one volume.

The great novelists present greater difficulties, for most of them have written so many books, each one of which may be regarded as typical, that a selection must be more or less arbitrary. Yet, such is their voluminousness that the inclusion of them complete in a small library is impossible; and there is nothing for it but that they must be present in the form of one or two representative volumes. The books of theirs which spring readily to the memory, as being those by which they are generally known, are probably those

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which are the most vital embodiment of their special gifts, — but one has only to name such to be reminded of others that have been omitted. Yet I think that a limit of three books will usually allow a very fair representation of a novelist. For instance, Thackeray is very fairly represented by “Vanity Fair,” “Henry Esmond,” and “Pendennis”; and Dickens by “Pickwick,” “David Copperfield,” and “Martin Chuzzlewit.” Walter Scott would not suffer by one’s choosing “Ivanhoe,” “The Bride of Lammermoor,” and “The Heart of Midlothian.” “Tom Jones” would suffice for Fielding, and “Pride and Prejudice” for Jane Austen; “The Mill on the Floss,” for George Eliot, and “The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,” for George Meredith. Taking only the great outstanding figures, Tolstoi need only be present with “Anna Karenina” and “War and

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Peace"; and Emile Zola with, say, "Drink" and "The Dream." "The Three Musketeers" and "The Count of Monte-Cristo" would suffice for Alexander Dumas, and "Les Misérables" and "Notre Dame de Paris" for Victor Hugo. It is harder to say of the vast mountain range of Balzac on what particular peaks our choice should fall, but probably here, again, the most popular books will prove the most typical, — "Le Père Goriot," "Eugénie Grandet," and "The Ass's Skin."

I am not, it must be understood, making any list of books "without which," as the booksellers say, "no gentleman's library is complete." I am only taking a few standard authors, for the purpose of illustrating a principle of selection which must perforce operate in a small library. The reader's temperament may be such that he doesn't feel the need of novels

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in his library, — though, as the novel is more and more absorbing the whole domain of human life and human thought, — becoming, so to say, the comprehensive *Bon Marche* of literature, — it is no longer to be ignored as mere amusement but has long been recognized as a serious and responsible, as well as entertaining, medium of expression. But each one to his taste, and even “Don Quixote” is a bore to some people. Yet, though a library, as I said, must be a personal embodiment, it must, at the same time, to deserve the name at all, be built with some regard to the general standards of literary importance, standards which have been evolved out of the experience and opinions of generations of readers of the most varied tastes and temperaments. Time is continually applying these standards over and over again, and it is seldom, if ever, that it reverses a long-

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established judgment. Therefore, if our library does not, or can not, contain all the best books, it must certainly contain some of them; and, however idiosyncratic of its owner, it must bear the stamp of a general distinction. A library, say, composed entirely of the ephemeral literature of the hour, might very well reflect the preferences of the owner, but it would be no more a library than a collection of old time-tables or directories would be a library. A certain fineness of mind and taste is presupposed of the would-be maker of a library, a certain seriousness of nature and an aspiration to live his life in the main currents of human experience. It may well be that the imaginative side of literature does not appeal to him, but rather its historical, philosophical, or social aspects, and his library may be built according to these predilections and yet claim to be some-



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thing more than a technical collection of books: — for the literary qualities which go to make a classic are not confined to the poets or novelists. I suppose that a library without a poet might be conceivable, — there probably are such libraries, — though it is a grim thought, and sounds like a house without a woman, or a garden without a flower.

Coming to the poets in our scheme, they are — from the library-maker's point of view, — much more manageable than the novelists. Voluble as the greatest of them have been, it has still been found possible to print, I think, every one of them in one-volume editions, — editions, too, on good paper and in readable type. Of course, it is preferable to read them in the more generous editions, and this, in the case of the few poets that especially appeal to us, it ought to be possible for us to do. It is a

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pity, I think, to read Shakespeare in small type, — though excellent and easily readable small-type editions are numerous. One should try to afford the luxury of that little pocket edition in which each play has a volume to itself, — an edition edited by Mr. Israel Gollancz and published here by the Macmillan Company. This is not only the most comfortable edition of Shakespeare, but it is also the most scholarly; though Professor Rolfe's edition published by the Baker and Taylor Co. is hardly less attractive in form, and is deservedly a classic among American school books. As Shakespeare is of such immense importance to us, such a generous representation of him in our little library is rather just than extravagant. Dante and Goethe are to be had in readable single volumes, and Milton and Keats easily lend themselves to a generous one-volume form.

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Even Wordsworth and Shelley and Coleridge are to be had in well-edited and comely one-volume editions. Byron is rather cramped in one volume, but the whole of Browning has been packed into two volumes luxurious enough for any library, and a one-volume Tennyson has been a familiar of the bookshelves for many years. Chaucer and Spenser need more room to be read with comfort, though the Macmillan Company's "Globe" edition of Spenser is handy and scholarly, and the same firm publishes an excellent two-volume selection from Chaucer, edited by Mr. A. W. Pollard. The Macmillan Company also publishes one-volume editions of all the other poets I have named, with the exception of Byron; editions which, both as regards editing and *format*, are among the best in the market.

The mention of Mr. Pollard's "Chaucer"

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raises the question as to how far selections and anthologies are useful in a library. The existence of such good one-volume complete poets as I have named makes it a question of less importance than it once was, — for when one's author, complete, takes up no more room, and costs no more than a selection from him, there is little point in buying the selection. Besides, however skilfully made a selection may be, one can never be sure that the editor has not omitted the very thing that had a special appeal for us. Yet there are some poets in whom the slag and waste products are so considerable, that one is thankful when some competent authority separates the precious metal into one small shining volume. This is the case with Wordsworth, and very much so with Coleridge. I fancy that there is little of Wordsworth outside Matthew Arnold's selection that we care to

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go back to, — except “The Prelude.” Most readers, nowadays, agree with Byron about “The Excursion,” but it is to be feared that Byron’s own long poems, with the exception of “Don Juan,” seem no less heavy reading to-day.

Byron, too, will bear selection. As for Coleridge, a very few pages are all that endure of all his rainbow volubility; but what pages! Again, Shelley and Browning are safely read in good selections. Then, too, not a few of the older poets, while, for individual readers, they may have such special appeal as to be valuable throughout, grow to have little meaning for the general lover of literature to-day. One might almost say this of the eighteenth century poets *en masse*, without, for an instant, denying the importance of Dryden and Pope, for example. Dryden and Pope are undoubtedly great poets,

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but they are great in a way alien to the imaginative and spiritual needs of the present age. The poets of the two centuries preceding them are far nearer to our time, simply because their inspiration was more universal, and closer to the natural heart of man. Chaucer is infinitely nearer to us than Pope, because of his deeper and more general humanity, and such real poets, great or small, — poets that voice the enduring feelings of mankind, — are always contemporary. Thus the cavalier poet Lovelace, with his one lyric, “Stone Walls do not a Prison Make,” in the end outweighs, in lasting importance, all the glittering achievement of a Pope.

The case of Lovelace may serve to illustrate the place of anthologies on one's shelves. You can buy a complete Lovelace, if you wish for it, but, unless you have a collector's or a his-

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torian's interest in him, it will give you little further satisfaction. The same applies to Sir John Suckling, with his delightful "Ballad of a Wedding," and even such exquisite lyrists as Herrick and Campion grow laborious in complete editions. Here the anthologist of taste and judgment is an invaluable friend, and, in one or two cases, he has done his work so well as to make an anthology that has, in its turn, become something like a masterpiece in itself. The model of all such anthologies is, of course, Palgrave's "Golden Treasury" of English lyrics, — a classic garland which is, perhaps, the one book you may be sure of finding on any bookshelf. A companion classic of selection, in which an equally fine taste has done the same service to lovers of the French lyric, is Gustave Masson's "*La Lyre Française*."

The anthologist illustrates the value of the

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critic in one's library, and that value is very great, both for the services of guidance and of entertainment. To some tastes there is no form of literature more stimulating and delightful than that of those critical essays in which some persuasive student of books interprets a masterpiece, or unfolds his own preferences. Taine's "History of English Literature" remains one of the most vivid and most useful books of this class; while Matthew Arnold's "Essays in Criticism" and Leslie Stephens's "Hours in a Library" will not only give the reader rare pleasure in themselves, but materially assist him in discovering his own tastes, — a discovery which is by no means made all at once. The "*causeries*" of the great French critic, Sainte-Beuve, partially translated, are, of course, classics of this kind; and the writings of George Brandes, the great



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Danish critic, slowly becoming accessible to English readers, are illustrative criticism of the most vital and picturesque kind. As I conclude this paper, I note that Messrs. Harper and Brothers are putting on the market an English series of critical biographies which has deservedly attained great distinction, and is of its kind without rival; viz., the well-known "English Men of Letters" series, edited by Mr. John Morley. Each volume is a biographical-critical study of some great English writer, written by a critic of authority, and often of distinction. Such men as Froude, Huxley, Trollope, Goldwin Smith, Austin Dobson, J. A. Symonds, Mark Pattison, and Sidney Colvin are among the critics, and most of the great English writers of various kinds are dealt with. Having been brought up largely on this excellent and delightful series, I am glad to see it

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coming over to America, and, as the volumes are small and cheap as well as good, I do not think that the reader I have had in mind in writing this article could cover three feet of his shelves more profitably, or make a twenty-five-dollar book investment to better advantage. Messrs. Harper and Brothers offer the set on the installment plan, — a modern plan which considerably facilitates the building of a poor man's library. Too often, however, the books thus offered for sale are expensive sets of one particular author, which one cannot afford, or does not desire to have so elaborately represented. Here, however, is a set which is a varied library in itself, a complete body of English literary history and criticism.

And, talking of biography, which I have tacitly included with history in this article, another excellent way to start your library is to

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begin with a good biography. Take Boswell's "Life of Johnson," for instance; or, if you prefer a world nearer our own time, with more of our modern atmosphere, try G. H. Lewes's "Life and Works of Goethe." Here are two books, indeed, which are like great railway termini, from which one may start out on any journey and arrive, far-travelled, at the remotest destination; for a real book is the one road to everywhere.

P. S. If it be objected that in considering the formation of a library I have said nothing specifically concerning American literature, I would answer that it is surely from no lack of regard for and delight in that literature, but merely because I have been writing in general terms, and because American literature is only one part of perhaps the greatest of European literatures, — English literature. But the im-

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portance and significance of America's contribution to English literature has, perhaps, hardly been sufficiently acknowledged. It is great indeed, and it is but fair to say that the great American writers have received at least as ample and as ardent an appreciation in England as in their own country. To this day, I would venture to describe Longfellow as the most popular of English poets, while England has certainly been ahead of America in her hospitality to Poe and Whitman — as, by a return of courtesies, America has occasionally done the like by English authors neglected in their own land. I always like to think that the first collected edition of De Quincey was published in Boston. It seems to me that when I was young, we read more American authors than British, and I am sure that Emerson and Thoreau and Whitman

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meant more to us than any British writer except Carlyle. As schoolboy reading, Fenimore Cooper ran Captain Marryat very close, and I recall several youthful libraries that made a point of elaborate sets of Hawthorne and Oliver Wendell Holmes. In selecting his American books the library-builder will, of course, proceed as in the case of any other literature, and follow the line of his natural needs. Whitman is not everybody's poet, neither is Poe — neither, as I said before, is Homer! In literature as elsewhere the proverb holds that you may take the horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink — nor in this case is there any necessity to make him. Let us read just what we want to read in American literature as elsewhere, always, of course, having a good try at the best first — for we must never forget that there *is* a best, whatever our individual tastes

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may be; and a library that should lack such American writers as I have named, and others one could name, would seem lonely to most of us, besides being seriously incomplete.

THE NOVEL AND  
NOVELISTS OF TO-DAY

*“Only young ladies from the boarding-school, or milliners’ girls read all the new novels that come out.”*

WILLIAM HAZLITT.



## VI

A SHORT while ago I saw that someone had been writing on "The Decadence of the Novel," — I think it was that brilliant young novelist, Benjamin Swift. Well, I don't know! Is the novel, when you come to think of it, in quite such a bad way? At the first flush, all contemporary pessimism is apt to find a ready acquiescence. It has the permanent discontent of human nature back of it. The sound of the great old men departing deadens our ears to the sound of the great young men arriving. No contemporary ever plays *Hamlet* like Kean. "And yet —, and yet —," says Stephen Phillips, himself a poet whose shoulders are rapidly broadening for

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one of the old mantles. Yes! Dickens and Thackeray are dead, it is true; and Balzac and Dumas no longer throw their vast shadows across the world; and yet, — well, let us for a little count our mercies in the shape of living novelists, and see if our day of small things is so diminutive, after all.

Have we any great novelists, properly so called? I do not mean merely able, brilliant novelists, — but novelists really great; the quality of greatness, perhaps we may premise, being an indefinable quality of the man himself bulking large behind the novelist.

Yes; we have Tolstoi, and Meredith, and Bjornson.

One has only to realize what these three men stand for to realize what a serious, spiritual force the novel has become in the modern world, and of what profound and delicate hu-

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man interest it has become the vehicle. Tolstoi is the Christian; Meredith, the philosopher; Bjornson, the patriot. All three are masterly story-tellers and creators of character. We read what they write for "the story," like the work of any other story-teller, but their stories move in an atmosphere so charged with the deepest meanings of life that they have the significance of veritable history, and the authority of spiritual messages. These men have been teachers of their time with an influence far beyond that of the professed religious and philosophical teachers. We have but to speak their names to state their significance. As with all other great personalities, their names are their meanings. All three, in their several ways, are giant witnesses to the spiritual solution of life. Tolstoi and Bjornson have made their testimony by tearing from Christianity the sophis-

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tries of its ecclesiasticism, and revealing it once more in all the astonishing simplicity of its original idealism. Tolstoi — in this respect, the master of Bjornson — has preached a fanaticism of unworldliness the value of which is not in its literal application, but in its sensational reminder of those essential purities and simplicities which at the first gave, and will always give, reality to the Christian movement.

Mr. Meredith's message is less overtly religious. He makes his appeal as a poet and philosopher, an evangelist for subtler minds. He takes more account of the world as it is, in all its complicated paradoxes of good and evil, courageously facing mountains of doubt that do not exist for simple seers like Tolstoi; and yet, at the end of a pilgrimage of faith made arduous by every pitfall and stumbling-block of the skeptical intellect, he comes to us ra-

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diantly worn with his unquenchable faith in the upper glories. I am saying nothing of him, or of Tolstoi and Bjornson, merely as novelists, because all three have used the novel for finer issues than even the most classical entertainment. In their hands the novel is the parable of the modern world. Like all great teachers, they also teach in parables. The parables are wonderful literature; but, however brilliant the style and technique of a parable, it is, after all, its message that is universally important. The novels of Tolstoi, Bjornson and Meredith are wonderfully entertaining, — but it is the attitude of the men behind them that gives them their greatest value.

I have named these writers first because they appear to me the greatest living personalities employing the novel for the highest literary purposes; but there are no few writers only

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a step below them whose work is hardly less notable as literature or less serious with a grave apprehension of the human situation. Indeed, the time is long since gone by when "novel-reading" was that merely frivolous indulgence in the fictitious upon which our fathers looked askance. Nowadays, if you have something of vital importance to communicate to the world, you do not put it into a sermon, however admirable, or a treatise, however learned. You put it into a novel: for the novel has proved itself so expansive a form that there is no material, human or divine, to which it cannot adapt itself. It does not necessarily displace all other literary forms, but it certainly includes them. As we continue our brief survey of modern novelists and their novels, it will be seen how wide is the territory of the contemporary novel.

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While the modern novelist is an unquestionable master of the good story and the living character, he is seldom content with being that, and there are few successful novelists to-day that are not psychologists, and sociologists as well. Let us take a few names at random, — Henry James, for example. That Mr. James is a master of the social drama will not be denied, even by those for whom the microscopical finesse of his observations is so fine as to pass their patience and even their apprehension. Yet it is hardly necessary to say that his chief distinction is that, so to say, of a scientist of society. A novel by him is less a novel than a Blue Book of the upper classes. He is, in this respect, the most painstaking of the pupils of George Meredith, though he lacks his master's fusing simplicity of imagination. If he is read in the future, he will be

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read as one reads Darwin on earthworms, — for his marvelous observations of minute social phenomena.

Mr. Howells, again, is an industrious social observer, but his observation is rather that of a man of the world than that of a social microscopist. He is a broader, more creative writer. There is, so to say, a Chaucerian objectivity about his observation. His business is with the average and the normal, and he will probably survive as the first painter of the American middle class. His excellent style is on the side of his endurance, whereas the style of Mr. James, like that of his great master, is plainly subject to writer's cramp.

Even a writer so robustly objective as Mrs. Gertrude Atherton would lose half her value if she were not so much of a philosopher and poet, and acute social observer as well. Full



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blooded as is the romance she gives us, her highest value is that of a subtle and fearless interpreter of the complexities of the modern world.

Mr. James Lane Allen, again, is nothing if not a philosopher and poet of nature. Perhaps it may be thought that the philosopher grows on him somewhat to the eclipse of the novelist, but happily the later tendencies of a master have no influence on his early masterpieces. "The Reign of Law" throws no shadow over "A Kentucky Cardinal," that idyl so perfect in form, and so exquisite in spirit.

Almost wherever we turn, we find the novel making its romance out of reality; reality in every meaning of that abused word, reality in its largeness, reality in its *minutiæ*. So much has the narrow little school of "realists" helped the great school of reality. Life has other

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realities than those seen by Zola and such disciples of his as George Moore, but his and their sincerity in recording the material facts of life has proved a much-needed lesson for those who are more concerned to record those other facts, more significant, as it seems to them, of the human spirit. These porers upon the dust have done us the service of making us, so to say, more truthful about the rainbow. They have introduced the scientific method into the seventh heaven, and installed the electric light upon the shores of old romance; and thus our dreams are shown to be true, though at the same time — dreams. Our very poets must be “realists” nowadays.

The idea used to be that the novelist “pretended,” that he adapted life to suit the tastes of the sentimental; that life was really a dull drab thing, and that its excitement existed only

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in some highly coloured arrangement of the inventive fancy. But nowadays we take a very different view of our novels. We have realized that it is life itself that is romantic, and that the truer our novels are to the facts of life the more romantic they will be. The old cant phrase that "truth is stranger than fiction," may indeed be said to have become the canon of the modern novel. We don't ask our novelists to lie about life any more. We ask them to tell the romantic truth.

The number of capable writers who are telling the various truths of life in the form of fiction is much greater than contemporary pessimists realize. There is indeed no corner of human experience which cannot produce its able, entertaining representative. Let us take some traditional forms of the novel, — the sea story, say. Captain Marryat was indeed a

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master, and yet Clarke Russell and Conrad and Jacobs! In the work of all these men one has to acknowledge that romantic fidelity to the facts rather than the fancies of the sea which I have spoken of as the note of the modern romantic realism. In the case of Conrad we have also a writer of the first literary importance, a novelist of action and serious vivid detail, who does not scorn to write good English, but who, more than that, Pole as he is, — and there is an additional marvel, — writes English of a quality so English that, incredible as it may sound, his words are no less exciting than his adventures. It may almost be said that the fact of his being a “foreigner” using our English tongue has possessed him with a regard for classical English which alas! we miss in such vociferous English writers as, say, Mr. Kipling, — Mr. Kipling, who is patriotic in everything but his language.

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Mr. Kipling perhaps, of all men, exemplifies the tremendous practical importance of the work that can be done by the modern story-teller. Regarded merely as a story-teller, Mr. Kipling is not more remarkable than the men from whom he learned his tricks, the idealistic reporters of our American papers. His method is the old-time method of the American smoke-room. He seizes on the obtruding details, and he nails them in the cosmopolitan slang of the moment. That is why we enjoy him so much, and why even our boys of fifteen are already beginning to wonder what he means. He chose to employ the means of the moment, for the expression of the ideals of the moment, — the Hans Christian Andersen of imperialism. But his clever little stories, which even we, who read them so eagerly as they appeared, yawn over to-day, meant nothing less than the New

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Notion of Greater England. They were much more than stories. They were the Colonial Sentiment, the Boer War, the Preferential Tariff. Mr. Kipling's significance is that of a political pamphlet. In the future his name will be known as the brilliant pamphleteer of Mr. Chamberlain, and it will be his politics that will keep his poetry alive.

Sir Gilbert Parker, again, is a novelist who illustrates the effectiveness of the novel as a political medium. Mr. Parker writes too well not to realize that he does not write well enough, and he is too much occupied with his social ambitions to concern himself with his literary failure. He is by no means despicable as a Canadian poster, — though, as a real exponent of Canada, he does not begin to compare with Charles G. D. Roberts. Few books of animal study so truly picture wild life as does Mr.

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Roberts's "The Heart of the Ancient Wood." No real writer is made a knight, though he may consent to become a lord.

Yet, in saying this one naturally thinks of Sir Conan Doyle, and remembers "Micah Clarke." Obviously "Micah Clarke" came out of the loins of "Lorna Doone," and Sir Conan would, I am sure, be proud of its derivation, for to be so sturdy a disciple of such a master is a wonderful beginning. Of all the recent products of "historical" novelists, "Micah Clarke" stands the one chance of survival, by reason of its strong construction, its strenuous and sweet spirit, and its quiet, forceful English. The public knows Sir Conan for lesser things, — for "Sherlock Holmes" (for which, with a modesty that is as characteristic as it is becoming, he has disclaimed the originality in favor of such masters as Poe and

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Wilkie Collins) and "Brigadier Gerard," but, without denying the literary resource of "Sherlock Holmes," it is "Micah Clarke" and "The White Company" that matter, and matter quite a good deal, to readers of modern fiction. Sir Conan Doyle may be truthfully said to be one of the public favourites that vindicate the public taste.

Talking of great novelists, what shall we say for such public favourites as Miss Marie Corelli and Mr. Hall Caine? Personally, I think that there is little to be said for Miss Corelli, except that she, obviously, supplies the gigantic demand in the human heart for sentimental melodrama, bogus mystery and cheap, semi-religious poetry. She is as inevitable as bad furniture and sentimental autotypes.

Mr. Hall Caine, to do him justice, is rather different. There was a time — when he wrote



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“The Deemster” — when he wrote with something of an original inspiration. He had felt the Celtic poetry of the Isle of Man, and he had been able to express it in terms of vivid drama. “The Deemster” remains Mr. Caine’s justification for his subsequent parodies and violations of a real gift. “The Bondman” was a striking book, in the Victor Hugo, and very much the Robert Buchanan, manner; but, with the coming of his financial success, the tares have sprung up and choked Mr. Caine’s artistic wheat, and such books as “The Christian” and “The Eternal City,” beyond selling well, have done nothing but show how Mr. Caine has imitated Zola’s later moralistic manner.

Fortunately, Zola’s simplicity has made better disciples in England; George Moore, for example, and George Gissing. Both writers

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suffer from the dulness of their subject-matter, yet "Esther Waters" is something more than a document, and "The New Grub Street" and "The Whirlpool" are engaging blue books of the middle class. Still, both writers illustrate the Englishman's way of taking his pleasures sadly. Even his novels must smack of the Sunday-school. "Robert Elsemere," for example, gained a success which placed Mrs. Humphrey Ward in the front rank of English theologians. She has since written books to prove that she was a novelist all the time. I suppose that she must be acknowledged as the creator of the popular religious novel, — and, in passing, one may note with what activity and with what success the modern woman writer has made use of the novel. Sometimes she has won a passing notoriety with the naively outspoken exposition of delicate social questions,

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with which she is hardly competent to deal. "Sarah Grand" is such a writer, and another writer of much greater power is "George Egerton." But America in particular can count on three young women writers of something like classical significance. I have already spoken of Mrs. Gertrude Atherton. Mrs. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman has long been recognized as the Jane Austen of New England; and Mrs. Edith Wharton possesses just that combination of social philosopher, poet-wit, and novelist which tempts one to call her the American "John Oliver Hobbes," — not to forget Mrs. Craigie in speaking of writers that are also women, — though, actually, Mrs. Wharton is a much more important writer. It must be noted, in speaking of English women writers, that the most offensively sexual novel of our days — "Sir Richard Calmady" — is the work

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of a woman; for the name of "Lucas Malet" cannot be omitted from the list of women writers of the moment. Of course, one doesn't forget that "Lucas Malet" has written "Mrs. Lorimer," "Colonel Enderby's Wife," and "A Counsel of Perfection" as well.

One of the notorious literary features of the time has been the "historical," or, should we not rather say, the costume novel. Stevenson, of course, set the fashion when, as Mr. H. B. Marriott Watson — one of his most faithful disciples — has been saying in the *Fortnightly Review*, he turned back the tide of French realism with that wonderful toy-book "Treasure Island." The way *in antiquam silvam* pointed out by Stevenson, has been followed by a few writers naturally fitted to tread it, — though it must be said that the select little army of romance has been followed by a most dis-

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tressing cloud of dull and noisy camp-followers. Even the real army has been rather disappointing, when one considers the opportunity provided by Stevenson's brilliant, and really authentic, raising from the dead of the great Sir Walter. There are names one mentions with gratitude and even respect, — such as Stanley Weyman (who must, perhaps, be credited with personally hailing back to Dumas), A. E. W. Mason, Egerton Castle, Booth Tarkington, — and yet not even the best of these literary manipulators of the plumed hat and the rapier have given us anything of which we can even remember the name, — without a self-conscious effort of gratitude. With the possible exception of "A Gentleman of France," this noisy "historical" fiction has left us nothing but a garish mountain of stage-properties, and a theatrical wardrobe already cloudy with the

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moth. It has not even produced a book comparable with "John Inglesant," not to mention such a book as "The Cloister and the Hearth." This is really strange -- for such an eager opportunity seldom passes with a response so breakneck and so moblike and yet so pitifully inadequate. Of course, such an historical novelist as Henryk Sienkiewicz belongs to an older greater period; though we must not forget to add the author of "Quo Vadis" and "With Fire and Sword" to that small company of the great to which I referred at the beginning of this article.

There are several other names of world-wide significance which, falling into no particular category, may as well be mentioned here: Pierre Loti, with his romantic egotism; Paul Bourget, with his psychological egotism; and Gabriel D'Annunzio, with his biological ego-

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tism. To M. Loti's iridescent French we owe one of our earliest and most alluring visions of the East; and through M. Bourget's limpid prose we have seen many a delicate secret of the heart of love. But Gabriel D'Annunzio is a stronger figure, a hot tumultuous nature, a very jungle of passion and inspiration. His books, indeed, are tropical in their coarse elemental power, offensive in their riotous vitality; their pages are heavy with Roman fever — and yet, what marvellous flowers spring out of this polluted marsh, what sanctifying skies stretch across it, and with what song of almost unearthly purity this beautiful morass can greet the dawn. After all, great writers must be taken as they are. They are not good for everybody, but perhaps nothing else is; and D'Annunzio is so great a poet that the evil in him of which we have heard perhaps too much

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is, I am inclined to think, burned up in the strong flame of his ascending spirit.

Another great, unclassifiable novelist for us who think in English is Thomas Hardy, whose earlier, less conscious, books — such early idyllic things as “Under the Greenwood Tree,” and such poetically conceived tragedies as “The Return of the Native” — will probably, as Herrick wrote, remain his “pillar” when “Jude the Obscure” is forgotten. Mr. Hardy, so to say, has been famous several times, in much the same way as Mr. Meredith. Long ago he was famous from “Far from the Madding Crowd.” Then his fame went to sleep, till he was rediscovered by a new generation with “Tess of the D’Urbervilles.” Over that almost Shakespearianly Arcadian novel one felt already that approaching shadow of grim Zolaistic morality which covered “Jude” with so



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thick a pall. Perhaps it was a pity that what was, after all, a passing pessimism should so "fright away the dryads and the fauns" from Mr. Hardy's orchards and fragrant hayfields, and substitute a determined Greek tragedy for those warm droppings of human tears which in "The Woodlanders" we had heard fall on the grave of Marty South. Still, every artist must take his own course, and Mr. Hardy has sufficient purely "artistic" achievement behind him to allow him to take divagations into advanced morality. It will be strange if England should ever forget to read one of the sincerest of English writers. Surely Thomas Hardy will return with the cowslips so long as the plow turns up arrowheads on Salisbury Plain.

Speaking of the English Hardy, one is reminded of Arthur Sherburne Hardy, whose "But Yet a Woman" is surely one of the quiet

American classics, and whose "Passée Rose" is worth all the recent "historical" imitations rolled together. Speaking too of what one might call isolated classics, one is surely not sorry that Henry Blake Fuller's strenuous work on the Chicago novel has not made us forget "The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani." But I would not be thought to speak of the Chicago novel with anything but respect. If only Frank Norris had lived! Yet the school of which he was the most conspicuous pen counts other men worth watching — men such as Robert Herrick and Churchill Williams; men who have seen and ably expressed the romance of American realism and American history. Mr. Chatfield-Taylor, of course, is a Chicagoan, too; but he is too much of a cosmopolitan wit and "fantast" to be counted merely as a prophet of his own country. Of course, Winston

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Churchill must not be forgotten as a conscientious exponent of American history; while Mr. Townsend has achieved the very rare distinction of fixing a national type in "Chimmie Fadden." Richard Harding Davis almost achieved a like success in his early "Van Bibber" stories. He has since written a delicious idyl in "The Princess Aline"; and, say what you will, he is a very brilliant journalist, and has a most attractive personality.

Perhaps of all the books inspired by what I might call the American historico-topographical movement, none (after "David Harum") comes so near to being the real thing as Owen Wister's "The Virginian." That, again, was one of the very few books popular with the public that justifies the public taste.

I find, in looking around the field of the contemporary novel, that quite a few of really sig-

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nificant names remain outside my classification. There are such born story-tellers as Marion Crawford and Seton Merriman; there is Henry Harland, who writes so prettily of that old Bohemia of the Latin Quarter that is gone; there is Anthony Hope, sprung so daintily from the loins of "Harry Richmond"; there is Maurice Hewlett, who is so true a poet and so intense a realist of old romance, that one begs him, on the bended knees of a devoted reader, to abandon the Meredithian mediævalism of his style; and there is Robert Hichens, who, in his loving observation of London life, unites something of the voluminous subtlety of his beloved Balzac, with the kindly Cockney portraiture of Dickens and Phil May. Then, again, there is H. G. Wells, who is so excellent a rejuvenation of his great master, Jules Verne; and yet, judging by some of his merely sub-lunary stories, is envious of the laurels of Mr.

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Gissing. Think of a man who knows all there is to tell about Mars, — the man who wrote “The Time-Machine,” — preferring to dissect the soul of a grocer’s assistant! Yet in “The Wheels of Chance,” and “Love and Mr. Lawisham,” Mr. Wells may be said to have achieved a genuine Clapham success. Still, dare one say to Mr. Wells that so many writers can teach us such ethics of the dust, and so few give us that lift above the dust which we gain from the more characteristic imaginations of his spontaneous science.

This review of modern novelists has necessarily been very cursory; yet, whatever names may involuntarily have been forgotten, I think it is full enough to illustrate the remarkable scope and general excellence of the modern novel. One can seriously say that the world, that has always stood in need of story-tellers, has never been better supplied.



CONFESSIO AMANTIS

*By the Author.*





WHEN do I love you most, sweet books  
of mine?

*In strenuous morns when o'er your leaves I pore,  
Austerely bent to win austerest lore,  
Forgetting how the dewy meadows shine ;  
Or afternoons when honeysuckles twine  
About the seat, and to some dreamy shore  
Of old romance, where lovers evermore  
Keep blissful hours, I follow at your sign ?*

*Yea ! ye are precious then, but most to me  
Ere lamplight dawneth, when low croons the  
fire*

*To whispering twilight in my little room ;  
And eyes read not, but, sitting silently,  
I feel your great hearts throbbing deep inquire,  
And hear your breathing round me in the gloom.*

















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